

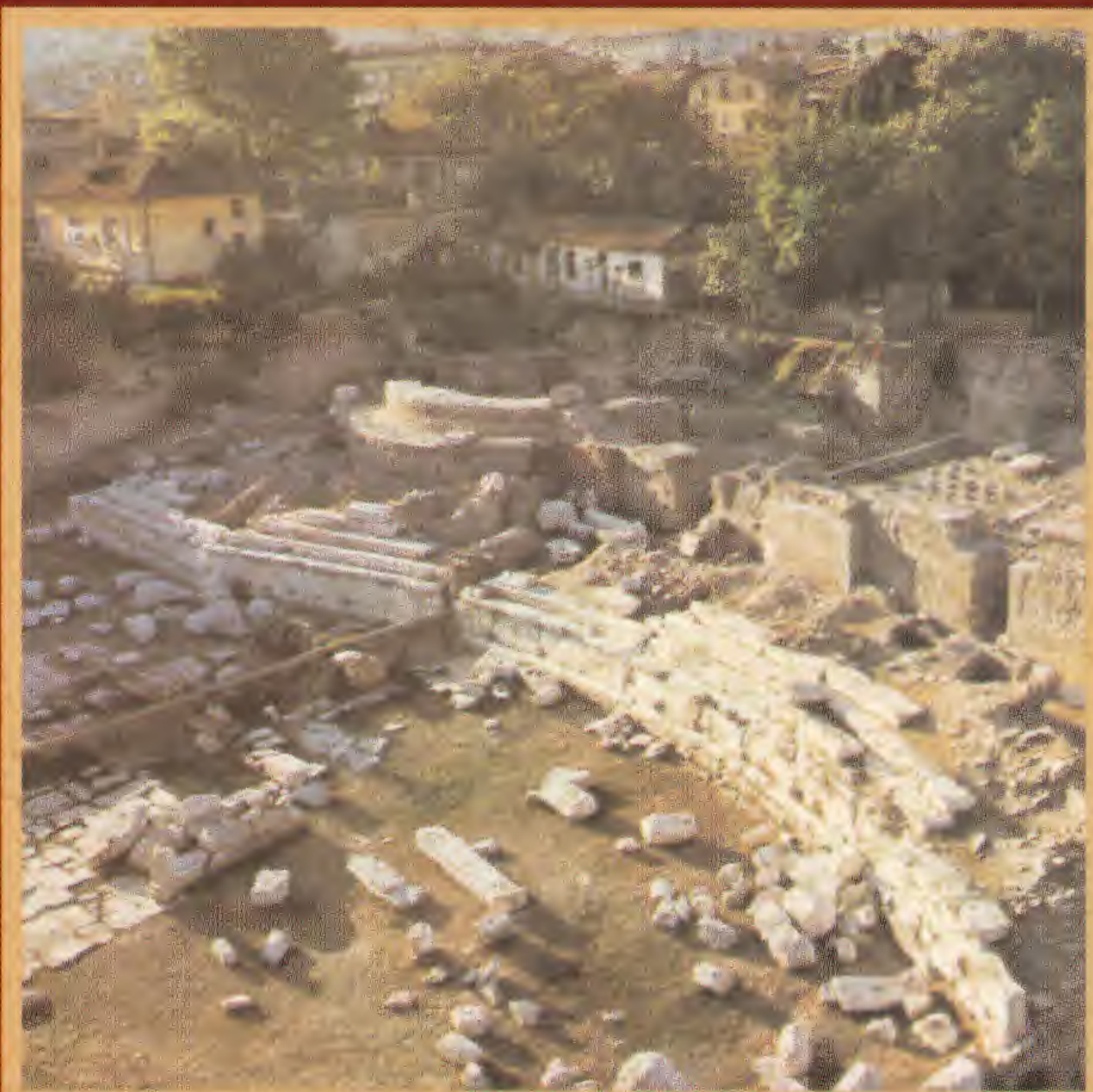
SEE BULGARIA

Rumen Ivanov



# Roman Cities in Bulgaria

Part II



Serdica

Philippopolis

Diocletianopolis

Beroe – Augusta Traiana

Mesambria Pontica

Pautalia

Nicopolis ad Nestum

R u m e n   I v a n o v

# Roman Cities in Bulgaria

## Part II



Sofia • 2006  
Bulgarian Bestseller  
National Museum of Bulgarian  
Books and Polygraphy

ВЪВЕДЕНИЕ

# РЪМЪН ТЕОФИЛОВ

1871-1944

ПЪРВО ИЗДАНИЕ

ПРЕДГОВОР



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# The Romans on both sides of the Balkan Range

In this book we have dwelled on 12 Roman cities in the chronological scope of 1st - 4th centuries AD. Their presentation is not complete as it depends on the extent of the archaeological excavations carried out. Furthermore, part of the large ancient urban centers now lie under modern cities and their exploration is difficult. Excavations are conducted mainly by the Archaeological Institute with Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences with the collaboration of the universities and especially the museums in the country. The ancient history of our lands has been of interest to European explorers and travelers (Italians, Austrians, Hungarians, Germans, Czechs, Frenchmen, Russians). In many of the cities and Roman military camps international excavations have been carried out (and some are still in progress) such as: Italian in Oescus (during the Second World War, a team from Milan and Sofia); Bulgarian-German in Jantrus (near the village of Krivina, Ruse region) (archaeologists from Sofia, Ruse, Berlin and Frankfurt am Main); Bulgarian-Polish in Novae (Svishtov) (Sofia, Svishtov, Veliko Tarnovo, Warsaw, Poznan); Bulgarian-British in Nicopolis ad Istrum (the village of Nikyup, Veliko Tarnovo region) (Sofia, Veliko Tarnovo, Nottingham); Bulgarian-Italian in Ratiaria (the village of Archar, Vidin region) (Sofia, Vidin, Bologna).

Here we shall briefly introduce the

readers to the historic and political atmosphere in the Thracian lands of present-day Bulgaria 2000 years ago, when the Romans came.

After the conquest of Macedonia and Achaia, the Empire looked to conquering the lands on both sides of the Balkan Range (Stara Planina) and reaching the Black Sea coast. The first more serious invasion was made by the legions of general Marcus Lucullus in 72-71 BC. He conquered the west Pontic Greek poleis. Apollonia Pontica (Sozopol) put up great resistance and was razed. Spoil from there was the 9-meter tall statue of Apollo by the famous sculptor Kalamis (5th c. BC) which was taken to the Capitolium in Rome. In 29-28 BC, Marcus Licinius Crassus, grandson of the triumvir Crassus who crushed the big slave revolt led by the Thracian Spartacus, undertook two large-scale marches in the Balkans. During the first march he conquered the tribes on the right bank of the Danube and those in present-day Western Bulgaria, and then headed south of the Balkan Range. The Thracian community suffered great losses in life. Thus, several decades later the Romans founded the provinces of Moesia (12 AD) and Thrace (45 AD).

Deploying military contingents in this part of the Balkans, the Empire did not lose time to take certain measures. The historian Appianus wrote that when Emperor

Tiberius (14-37) came to power the Moesians were imposed taxes and attached to the Roman treasury. The second thing the rulers of the world did was to build a network of roads for the purposes of military communications and the economic infrastructure. The local roads were repaired, and the inter-province thoroughfares acquired great importance. Along the right bank of the Danube, in less than a hundred years a road was constructed from Singidunum (Belgrade) to the Danube delta (over 1000 km). The famous Via Traiana came from Pannonia and Dacia, crossed the Danube at Oescus (village of Gigen, Pleven region) and went on to the Trojan Pass, crossing Haemus (Stara Planina) and heading towards Philippopolis (Plovdiv), the largest city in Thrace. Then it ran south through the Rhodope Mountains to join the old Via Egnatia. The latter came from Italy, Albany and Macedonia and following the coast of the Aegean and the Sea of Marmora reached the Bosphorus and Asia Minor. Also the so-called Central Road from Singidunum to Serdica (Sofia), Philippopolis (Plovdiv), Hadrianople (Edirne) and Byzantium (Constantinople, now Istanbul). At every several Roman miles, roadside posts were built where horses could be changed, the travelers could rest and the goods stored. The Roman mail operated accurately for its time. Communications were good on the other side of the Danube, too. In the section of the Lower Danube (between Zhelezni Vrata in Serbia and the delta) the

Romans built eight bridges (stone-and-wood and pontoon) which provided links to the neighboring province of Dacia (founded in 106 AD) and the barbarian world. The third important thing the conquerors did was to move tribes, mainly from the other side of the Danube, to the sparsely populated areas. The settlers were given arable land and this increased the crops and the money in the provincial treasury. Later the federate-tribes guarded the Danube border. The Romans imposed their religion but were tolerant to the subjugated tribes. These, as well as all foreign militaries and new settlers who arrived later, were allowed to practice their cults.

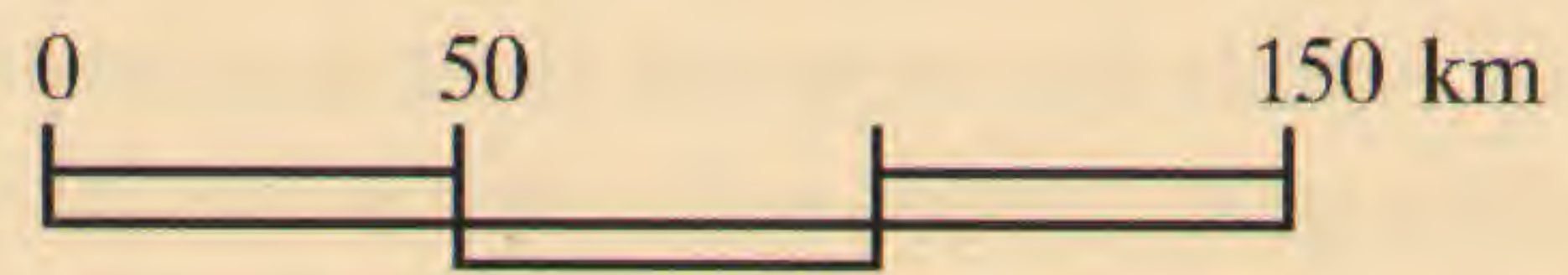
The major contribution of the Romans, however, was the urbanization of the provinces. In this part of the peninsula they found areas of different degrees of urbanization or none at all. There were old Greek poleis at the coast of the Black Sea, the Sea of Marmora and the Thracian (Aegean) Sea. South of the Balkan Range stood out Philippopolis, while between the Balkan Range and the Danube there were simply no urban centers. Here comes the contribution of Emperor Marcus Ulpius Trajanus or Trajan (98-117), who laid the foundations of large-scale urbanization of Roman Moesia (later Upper and Lower Moesia) and Thrace. When Plinius Junior (nephew of Plinius Senior) as governor of the neighboring province of Pontus and Vitinia asked the Emperor for building assistance, Trajan answered: "You must address the Governor of Moesia because I have sent all

my architects and engineers there to build new cities." This deed was continued by his successors Hadrian (117-138), Antoninus Pius (138-161), Marcus Aurelius (161-180), Commodus (180-182), and Septimius Severus (193-211). Another boom of urbanization came in the time of Emperor Constantine the Great (306-337) and his sons.

The construction of new cities and the rebuilding and modernization of old ones was a complex and manifold process. On the one hand, it required financial resources, and on the other, numerous and highly skilled workers (in the 2nd century many craftsmen from the Aegean and the eastern Mediterranean settled here and put in their experience and eastern color in the urbanization of the Balkan lands). The making of an urban center requires an infrastructure, which includes the laying of a water-supply and sewerage system and a street network, the erection of private, public and cult buildings – temples and sanctuaries, the procurement of diverse building material locally or from other provinces.

We hope this book will suit the taste of many Bulgarian and foreign lovers of ancient history and archaeology in the Bulgarian lands.





# SERDICA

## Sofia

*"Serdica – this is my Rome!"*  
(Emperor Constantine the Great)

### The mineral springs near the Skombros Mountain

The first inhabitants of the Sofia plain settled here as early as the 7th millennium BC. Later, we learn, the Trerians and Tilataeans lived here. Then, in the 4th-3rd century BC the Celts came to these parts, but we do not know how long they stayed. When the historian Cassius Dio described the marches of the Roman general Marcus Licinius Crassus in 29-28 BC, he mentioned that his legions crossed the lands of the Serdians (or Sardians). The ancient Thracian settlement was built up where today is the center of Sofia (around Sheraton Hotel, the Presidency and north of them). These lands were part of the Odryssae kingdom. Here the conditions were favorable for habitation. There were mineral springs, nearby was the Skombros Mountain (Vitoshka), where timber was procured and ore was extracted. Centuries later, Amian Marcellin (4th century AD) would note about Serdica and Philippopolis (Plovdiv): "Both cities are large and famous. It is as if nature has ordained the tribes in the surroundings to be subordinated to Rome."

In 45 AD, during the reign of Claudius,

Serdica fell within the territory of the newly founded Roman province of Thrace.

### Trajan's city

The Emperor transformed the settlement into a Roman city, named Ulpia Serdica. However, most of the writing here was done in Ancient Greek and many inscriptions and coins bear the name Serdonopolis, the city of the Serdians (Fig. 1). The majority of the population was Thracians. Some of them



Fig. 1 A 3rd century coin minted in Serdica  
(Archaeological Institute with Museum, Sofia) (photo R. Stanera)



*Fig.2 Head of god Apollo (gilt bronze)  
(Archaeological Institute with Museum, Sofia) (photo Kr. Georgiev)*

occupied priest's positions and were members of the *gerousia* (council of the elders). In the 2nd century AD many Hellenic emigrants from the Asia Minor cities came here. People worshiped Apollo the Healer and Asclepius, on account of the hot mineral water (Fig. 2). These gods were often personified by the Thracian Horseman (Heros), the chief deity of the local population. The ruins of a temple of Zeus were uncovered in the northern part of Serdica, while to the southeast a temple of

the Egyptian Sarapis was found. Artemis, Athena, Heracles, Dionysus, the Eastern divinities Cybele and Mithra were also worshiped.

The important decisions were taken by the Municipal Council, while the *demos* (people's assembly) had rather a consultative function. The first archon selected his deputies (*buleutae*) responsible for the economy and order in the district.

### **The wall of life**

Thrace was an inland province and hence it was more rarely a scene of barbarian intervention from the north. This is why Serdica was not surrounded by a fortified wall for a long time. However, in 170 AD the Costoboci tribes crossed the Danube, ravaged Lower Moesia, crossed over to the other side of the Balkan Range and their cavalry raged over Thrace. They did not stop here and went southwest to Macedonia and Achaia. The city of the Serdians suffered damages like many others in the province (Nicopolis ad Istrum, Philippopolis, Augusta Traiana, Pautalia). The administration resolved the city to be surrounded by a wall right away. In contrast to the other settlements in Thrace, this fortress wall was made of brick, standing on deep stone foundations. The four gates bore an identical building inscription. The wall was constructed during the joint reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus (between 176-180 AD). The encompassed city area was about 16 hectares. In 250-251 the Goths incurred

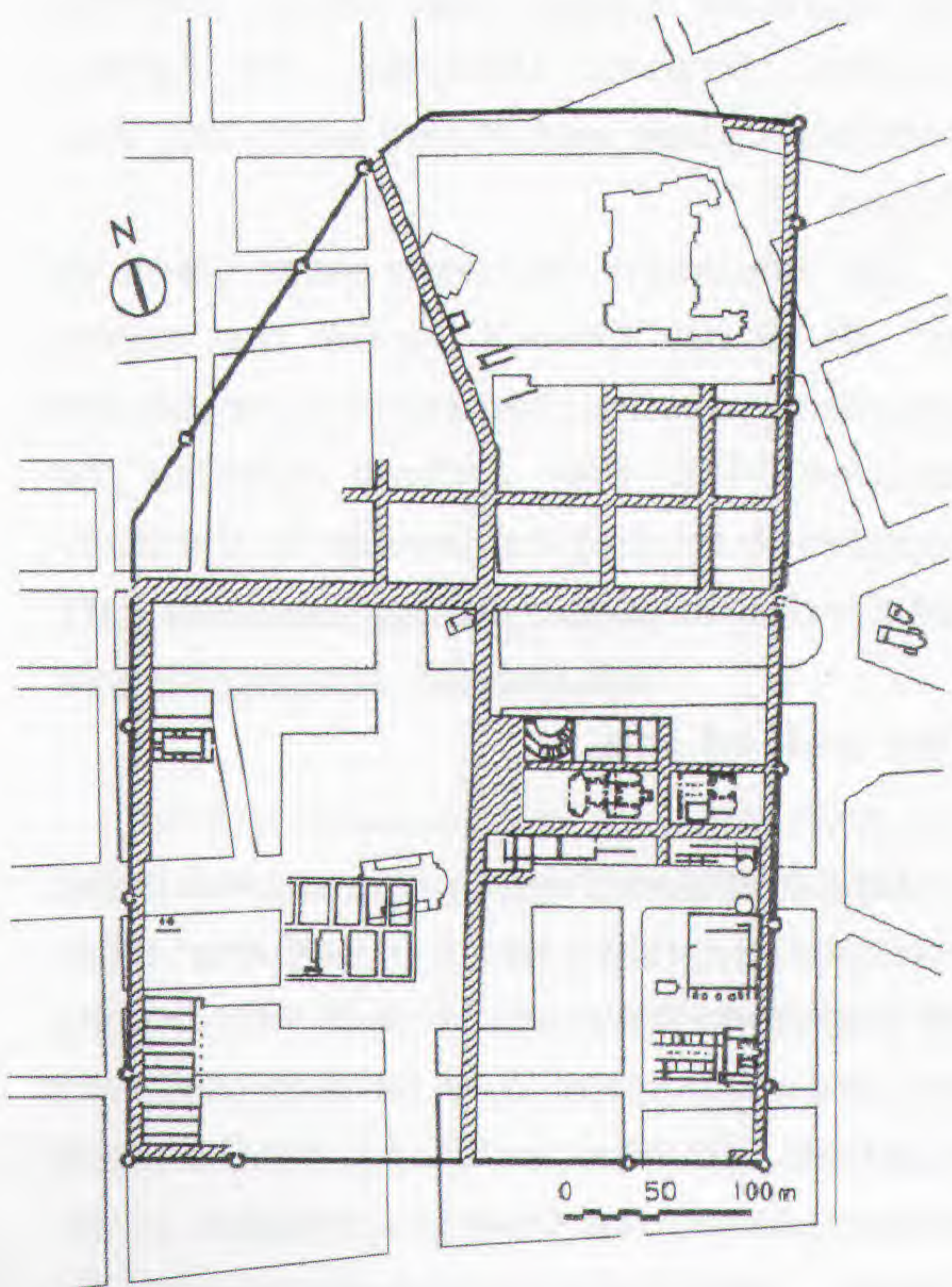


Fig.3 Plan of Serdica during the reign of Constantine the Great (after M. Stancheva St. Goshev)

heavy damages to the cities on both sides of the Balkan Range. Serdica was no exception, but when in the time of Emperor Aurelian (270-275) the city became capital of the new province of Mediterranean Dacia, the wall was rebuilt. Constantine the Great put the wall in good trim and even expanded the city northwards (Fig. 3). Then the Huns arrived. In 443 the fortress was almost razed to the ground and the citizens started rebuilding and thickening it (Fig. 4, 5, 6, 7). Much later, the historian Procopius of Caesarea wrote that Emperor Justinian



Fig.4 Fragment from the eastern wall of Serdica (photo T. Ivanov)



Fig.5 Plan of the eastern gate of Serdica (Central subway in front of the Presidency) (photo T. Ivanov)



Fig.6 Triangular tower at the eastern gate of Serdica (Central subway in front of the Presidency) (photo T. Ivanov)



Fig.7 Round tower in the northeastern part of Serdica (photo St. Boyadjiev)

(527-565) repaired the wall of Serdica because it was weathered and made it immune against attack.

### One of the symbols of Sofia

In the center of Serdica stood the city hall (bouleuterion). Its ruins were localized during the construction of Hotel Balkan (Sheraton). This edifice underwent several reconstructions, particularly in the late 3rd

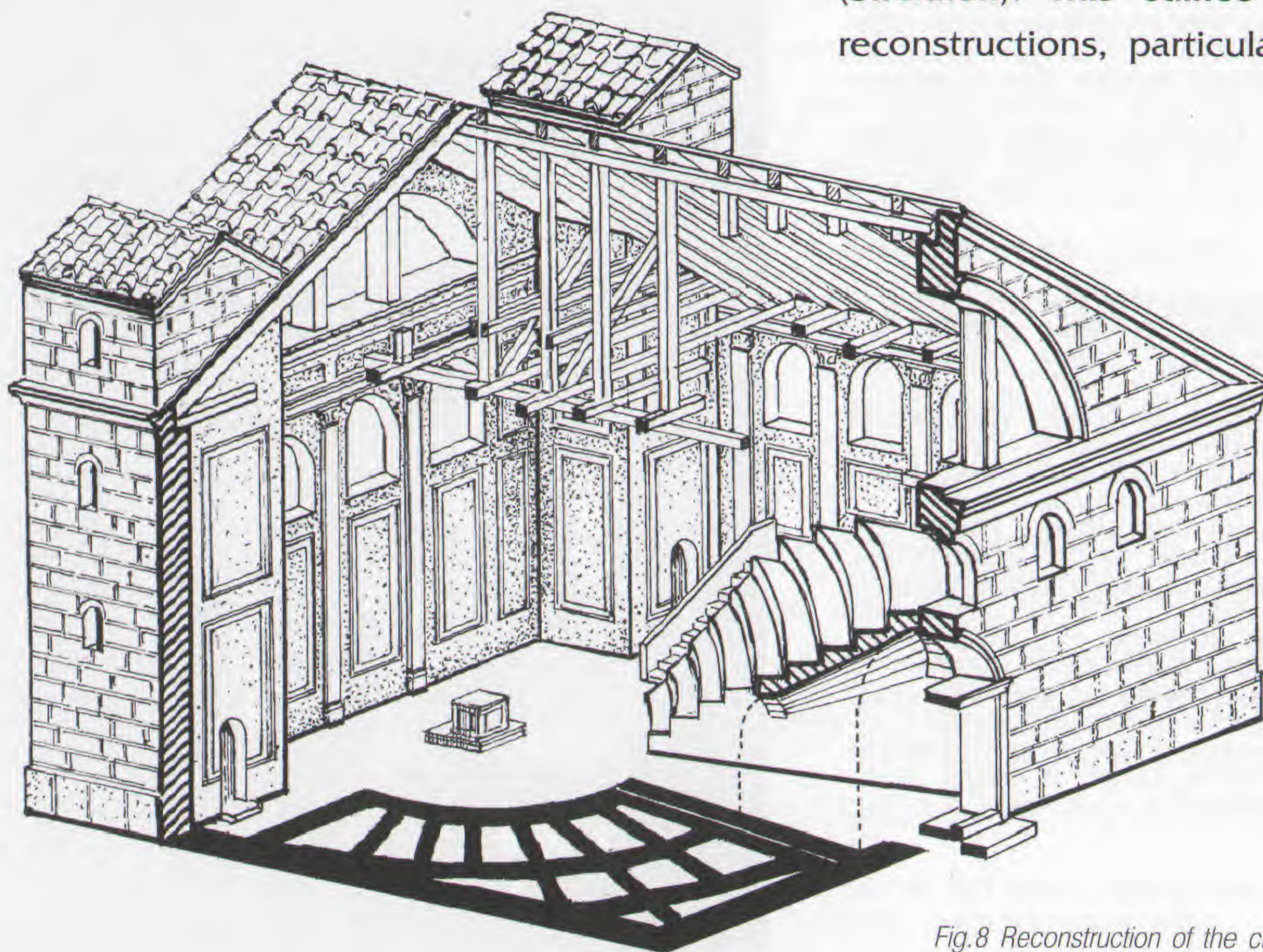


Fig.8 Reconstruction of the city hall (bouleuterion) of Serdica (after St. Boyadjiev)

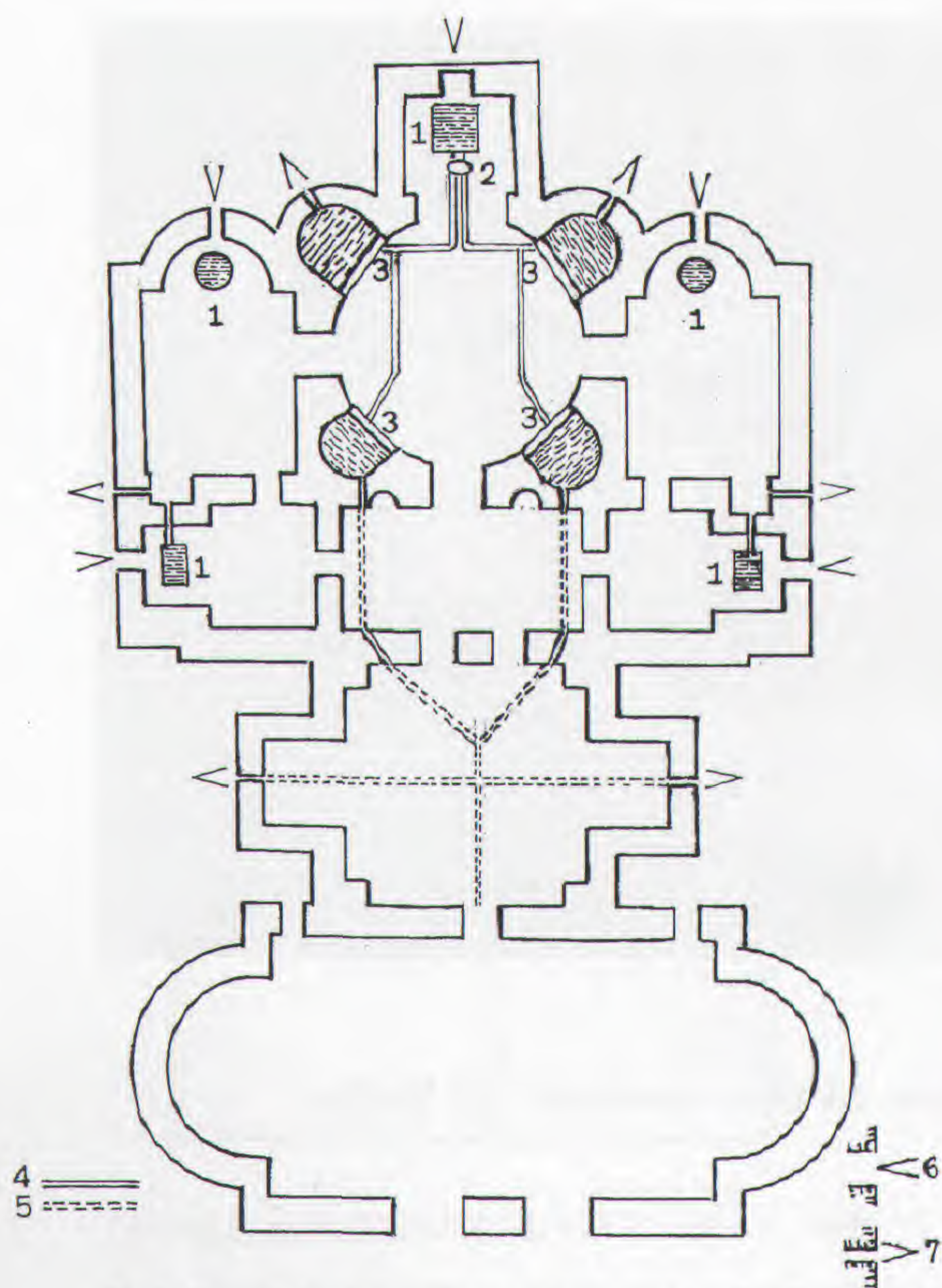


Fig.9 Plan of the late antique balneum under St. George Church (after Arch. St. Boyadjiev)

century when the city became province capital (Fig. 8). To the west, under the contemporary St. Nedelya Church, large thermae were built for the citizens. East of the city hall another balneum (baths) was erected (today's courtyard behind the Presidency). It evidently replaced the large thermae destroyed by the Goths in 250. The baths existed till the time of the Edict of Milan (313 AD) granting religious freedom. Then the Serdica Orthodox municipality transformed the building into its temple. To the west, however, in the last decades of the 4th century, a greater and more imposing balneum was erected (now under St. George Church).

Fig.11 The St. George Rotunda complex viewed from the east (after History of Bulgaria, 1979)

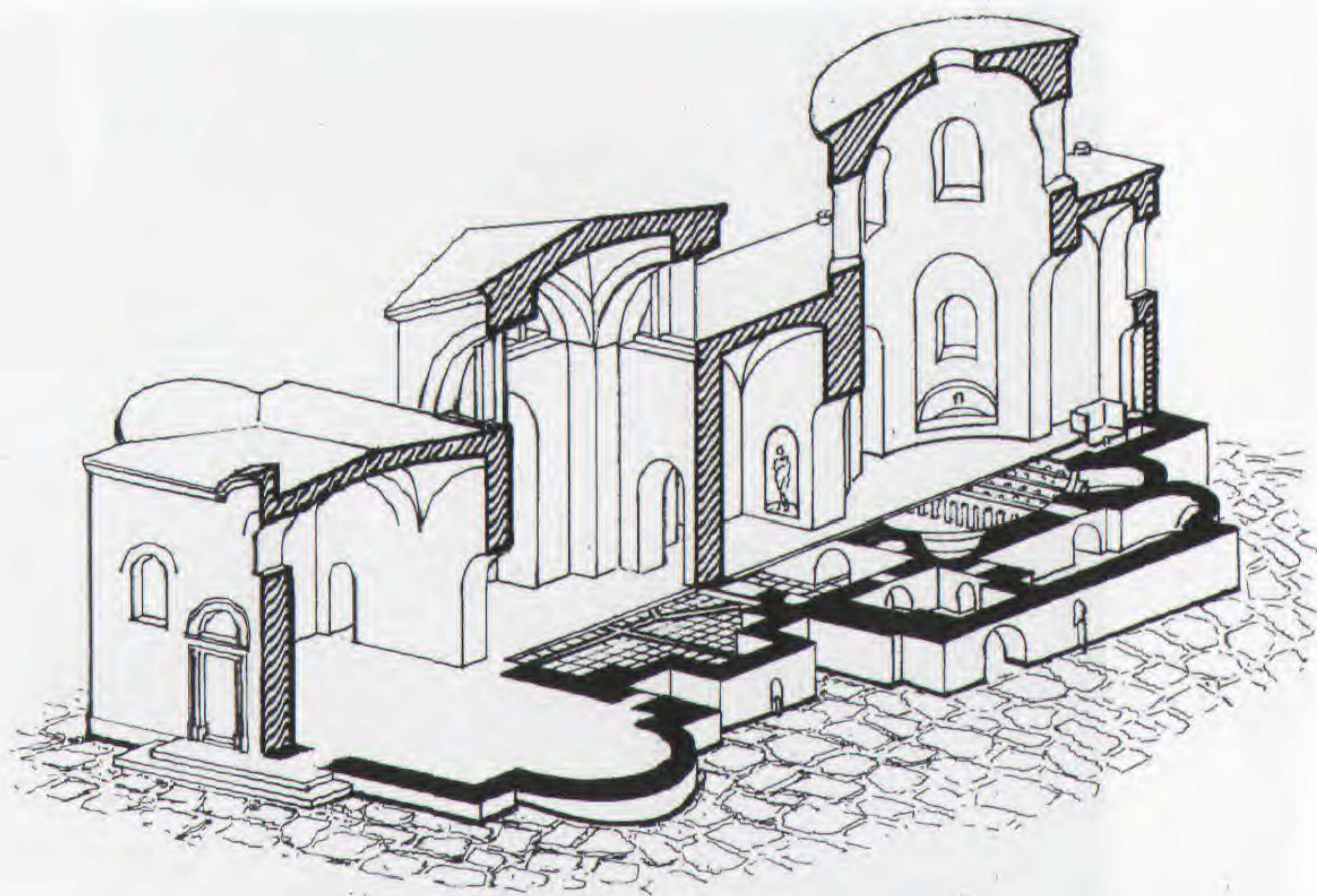


Fig.10 Axonometric cross-section of the late antique balneum under St. George Church (after Arch. St. Boyadjiev)





*Fig. 12 Ruins  
of residential buildings  
(north of Bulbank)  
(photo St. Boyadjiev)*



It had all **bathing** premises necessary for a long and pleasant stay (Fig. 9, 10). **Ordinarily** buildings through which a lot of water passes and are constantly subjected to the action of humidity do not last long. Besides, around the **middle** of the 5th century Christianity was in full swing, and the **better** part of the building was transformed into a large cult home for praising Christ. Nowadays, the building is one of the symbols of Sofia and is known as the Rotunda of St. George (Fig. 11).

A large public quarter with many buildings from different periods was uncovered northwest of the bouleterion (north of Bulbank). Buildings date back to the Roman and early Byzantine periods and the Middle Ages (Fig. 12).

### **The marble placards – a modern way of advertising**

A theater was put up east of the fortified wall during the reign of Emperor Commodus (180-192). In addition to drama performances, it was probably fir for gladiator's combats. Much later, when Christianity was adopted, a small chapel was built on the stage/arena. This is what Christians did at places where human blood was shed. In 2004-2005 the amphitheater of Serdica was localized 200 m east of the eastern gate. The amphitheater had been erected later. It functioned actively during the



Fig.13 Advertising placard for spectacles in Serdica (Archaeological Institute with Museum, Sofia) (photo Kr. Georgiev)

time of Diocletian (284-305) and Constantine the Great (306-337) and later. Constantine issued an edict prohibiting the bloody gladiator's combats in the Eastern Empire, to which our lands pertained (325 AD). Wrestling with wild beasts and any other entertainment, which did not involve the loss of human life, were allowed.

From Serdica originates a unique marble placard-plaque, inviting the local people to a grand show (Fig. 13). Animals from different geographic zones are represented on it. In the center of the advertising placard there is a crocodile. It is quite possible that such an animal had been brought from distant lands

for the inhabitants of the capital of Mediterranean Dacia province. Monkeys are also depicted, probably trained and used to amuse the audience. The tamer is "playing" with a bear put in a roundabout revolving around a vertical metal axis. A second tamer is wrestling with another bear. An acrobat is also represented who is about to jump with a long pole over an approaching bull. This attraction is believed to have taken place after the prohibition of gladiator's combats in these lands and maybe before the Serdica Council in 343.

## The Emperors decided to convene an Ecumenical Council in Serdica

Presbyter Arius came from Alexandria, Egypt, and preached that Christ was only a semblance of God and not part of the trinity God-Father-Holy Spirit. He was banished from these lands and sought shelter in Syria. There he found adherents among the priesthood from the School of Antioch, who were inclined to see the world dialectically and were exponents of the revived Hellenism. Arius' followers multiplied and this made Emperor Constantine I the Great (306-337) convene urgently an Ecumenical Council in Nicaea. There Arianism was condemned as a doctrine and pronounced a heresy. Arius and his most faithful friends were exiled to Illyria. On the way they passed through Thrace, Moesia and Dardania. Large areas were "infected" with this teaching. Particularly Nicopolis ad Istrum, where Wulfila's Goths lived, and Durostorum. There was need of urgent measures. Thus Constans, Emperor of the Western Empire, proposed to Constantius, ruler of the Eastern Empire, to convene an Ecumenical Church Council. Serdica was chosen for its venue. From the western regions came 300 bishops, whereas from the eastern only 76. The two groups quarreled immediately as those from the east wanted certain persons from the western delegation to be banished. The bishops of Serdica and Cordova, Spain, did not assent and this brought on the schism. The eastern bishops left the council and held a counter-council in Philippopolis. Those

remaining in Serdica condemned them in default, and the controversy deepened further after this ecumenical council. Historian Sozomen wrote: "After this council, the eastern and the western bishops no longer communicated as men of the same creed, nor got together. The eastern restricted themselves to Thrace, and the western to Illyria."

## The legend of Sofia

Today the three-nave basilica St. Sofia is a most frequented place by the inhabitants and guests of the capital. There are several legends about the construction of this Christian temple on part of the ancient necropolis of Serdica. However, one legend



Fig.14 Mosaic panel depicting the Garden of Eden  
(photo B. Filov)

stands out. Sofia was a beautiful young woman in the entourage of Emperor Constantine the Great (306-337). She fell ill and the doctors prescribed her to go to a place with fresh air and salutary mineral water. And since the Emperor was very fond of Serdica, the young woman went to this city. In time she died and her body was buried right here and the church was erected. The earliest structure investigated by the archaeologists dates to the time of Constantius II, the son of Constantine the Great (a little after the middle of the 4th cen-

tury). A chapel was built and decorated with nine mosaic panels. The central panel is of greatest interest. It represents a scene typical for the era, viz. the idea of the Garden of Eden with birds, cypresses and vines (Fig. 14). Between the end of the 4th century and the time of Justinian (527-565) the church underwent three major repairs and destructions. During the Ottoman domination it was transformed into a mosque. Today the Basilica of St. Sofia is restored and its basement is still explored. It is open for worshipers and tourists (Fig. 15).

*Fig.15 The facade of St. Sofia Basilica today*



# PHILIPPOPOLIS

## Plovdiv

*"Philippopolis was the finest of all cities,  
whose beauty shined from afar"*

(Lucian, *The Fugitives*, 24-25)

### **Love and hate, or how the river Rhombos became Hebros**

Once, long ago, today's Maritsa river was called Rhombos. It was wide, navigable and at places it swirled in steep rapids. Cassander, the ruler of the land, had a wife who gave birth to a son Hebros. But pretty soon the ruler's love for his wife faded and he brought to the palace the young and cunning Damasipe. To his misfortune, she fell in love with the handsome youth Hebros at first sight. Hebros, however, put her off and retreated into the mountain hunting. Then Damasipe complained to Cassander that his son tried to rape her. The jealous king rushed with his suite to punish him cruelly. The youth ran but when he reached Rhombos he saw his way was cut from all sides. So, he jumped into the turbulent river, which was henceforth called after him.

Present-day Plovdiv is the center of the Thracian valley, and the Maritsa-Hebros flows across it. In times gone by, the river provided good irrigation to the land and plenty of fish for the people. The climate here was always mild, and the soil fertile and rich for the farm-

ers. People procured pure drinking water from the nearby Rhodope Mountains, as well as stone, timber, ore and game. It is no chance that man found sustenance in these lands since hoary antiquity (the Neolithic, the Bronze and Iron Ages). Once there were seven hills here, as in the Eternal City, three of them being rocky and taller than the others (Nebettepe, Djambaztepe and Taximtepe).

### **The city with many names**

The ancient Thracian settlement (on Nebettepe) is believed to have been called Eumolpia. Plinius Senior describes a Thracian settlement near the Rhodopes and refers to it as Poneropolis. In 341 BC, Philip II of Macedon came here and expanded the place, turning it into a municipal center. A garrison was temporarily stationed here. The ruler called the city by his own name, Philippopolis – the City of Philip. Among the local population this sounded like Pulpudeva and they called it so. A strong wall encircled the top of the hill. Shortly before Thrace became a Roman province, on the hill stood the residence of the Thracian dynast Roimetalkas II, a faithful friend

of Rome. He even helped to suppress the unrests in the mountainous regions in 21 and 26, and the Romans were very grateful to him. Under Claudius (41-54) the Roman administration called the city Trimontium – The Three Hills. This new name, however, did not gain wide circulation. The city was generally known as Philippopolis and preserved this name until the Middle Ages.

### About coins and gods

The numismatic material found in the city and its environs gives us valuable information about life in this land. The region of present-day Plovdiv was indirectly involved in the Peloponnese War between Athens and Sparta in the distant 5th century BC (431-404). From here originate electronic staters from the city of Kyzikos in Asia Minor. What happened then? During the military operations, Athens was not able to buy grain from Euboea and Sicily. Therefore, it turned north to Thrace. The coins discovered here are evidence that grain was purchased from the region of Plovdiv and transported down the navigable Maritsa river to the Athenians. The tetradrachmas of Thasos and Athens indicate live communications between this region and other centers on the Balkans. In the time of the Roman presence, the city of Philippopolis-Trimontium was given the right to mint its own coins, during the reign of Emperor Diocletian (81-96). From their effigies we judge about the socio-economic life here, of the urban development and religion. Due respect was given to the river Hebros, personified as a young semi-nude

bearded god, recumbent on an amphora, from which water is pouring out. In one hand he holds attributes of fertility – an ear of wheat, a plant sprig, a flower. Other coins depict boats and river ships, indicative of the intensive trade along the river and in the valley. From Plovdiv comes a very curious bronze coin. It represents three girls. One is reaping, the middle one is cradling sand from the river for gold, the third one is digging out ore from a pit, doubtlessly in the Rhodopes. The mountain is also depicted on a coin with Orpheus, sitting on a rock playing his lyre. It represents the time when the magic singer had lost his beloved Eurydice and withdrawn to the mountains. From the coins we learn about the government and status of the largest city in Thrace. Philippopolis received two important honorary distinctions. It was a metropolis, i.e. chief city. The administrative capital of Roman Thrace was Perinthos on the Sea of Marmora, but undoubtedly the city on the river Hebros was the most prosperous and imposing. Philippopolis was also granted the right to be neocoria – protector of the imperial cult. A special college of priests was elected to perform the duties to the supreme ruler of the Empire in a newly built or existing stately temple. The city had a demos (people's assembly) and a boule (municipal council). Another type of coins represent hilltop statues of Apollo, Heracles and Hermes.

### The lowland city

With the establishment of Roman power, Philippopolis underwent incredible expansion.



Fig.1 Plan of the Roman Philippopolis

Its urbanization spread to the low flat area under the hills. When during the reign of Marcus Aurelius in 172 the city erected a strong stone wall, it encompassed 70 hectares (Fig. 1). The main entrance was the eastern gate. The city length east-west was 1000 m, and north-south 650-700 m. Philippopolis was properly planned, its streets being oriented to the four cardinal points. So far there is evidence of 18 cardines and 17 decumani. Under the streets functioned a well built water and sewerage mains. Drinking water was supplied by the catchments at present-day Markovo village, 12 km away from Plovdiv, and at Kuklen village, in the direction of the Rhodopes.

Where the two main streets *cardo maximus* and *decumanus maximus* intersect is the city square. These two thoroughfares meet at the eastern entrance of the square. It occupies an area of 11 ha and is the largest forum from

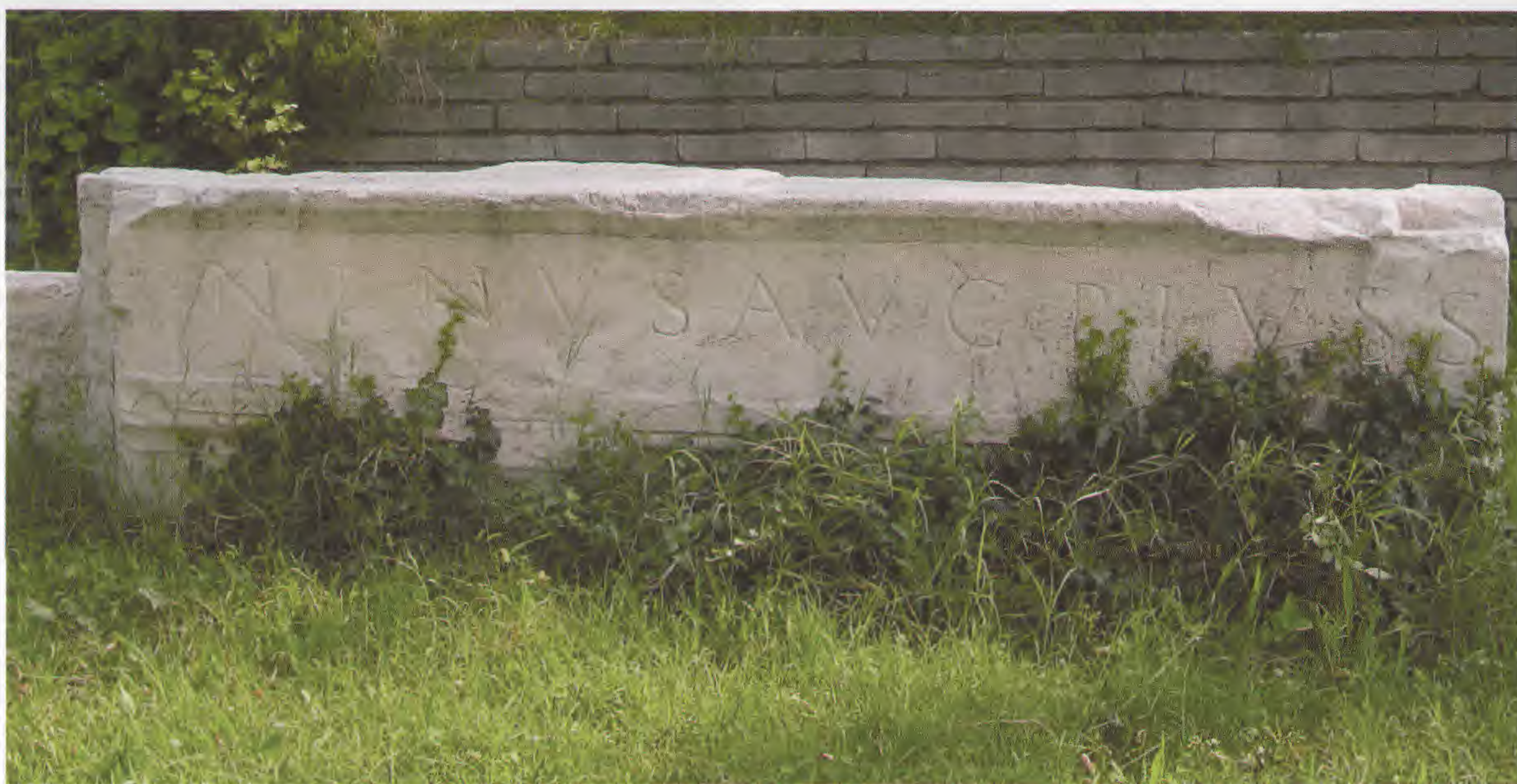


Fig.2 Frieze-architrave from the treasure-house of Philippopolis

the Roman period in today's Bulgarian lands (143 m north-south – 136 m east-west). It was laid out as the agora of the Greek towns in Asia Minor. In the center was the area – the open-air square. It was surrounded on three sides (east, west and south) by 71 shops (24 on the eastern and western side each and 23 on the southern). Between the area and the shops there was a covered colonnade where the citizens and guests of Philippopolis strolled. Doubtlessly the liveliest trade in the city was carried out in this zone. The north-eastern part was occupied by a building of dual purpose – bouleuterion (municipal council) and odoeon (small theater). In the north-western part of the complex was erected the “treasure-house of Philippopolis”, as the inscriptions on two frieze-architraves found there reads (Fig. 2). It accommodated the city treasury. The building was erected during the reign of Emperor Commodus between 183-184. Many public baths were built for the hygienic needs of the large city. So far two thermae have been uncovered. One is right next to the forum. They were equipped not only with the basic rooms and bathing pools, but also had parlors for massage, smearing with fragrance oils, and spots for informal or business talks. Many of the rooms had mosaic flooring. These thermae were destroyed in the Gothic invasion of 250, but they were shortly reconstructed. In the eastern part of the city other thermae of area 2500 sq. m were found. The floors are covered with mosaics, and the walls are lined with marble. The thermae functioned between the early 4th century and the late 6th century, when they



Fig. 3 The theater of Philippopolis

were destroyed by fire. In today's Plovdiv the remnants of many private and public buildings have been found, notably a residence, property of a person of high rank (4th century), and a vaulted structure from the late 3rd century onwards. Other private villas that were uncovered now bear the names of the mosaics found in them. One is the House of Narcissus.



This beautiful boy was the son of King Kefisos of Boeotia. The nymph Echo fell in love with him, but he seduced her and abandoned her. Aphrodite was enraged and punished him to sit at a limpid mountain stream and contemplate his reflection. Gradually the boy developed such yearning for himself that he turned into a flower, symbol of unfeeling and cold

beauty. The other one is the Villa of Eirene. Eirene was a daughter of Zeus and Themis, goddess of peaceful life and mother of the wealth and splendor of spring.

### **Bread and circuses**

The pride of the Plovdiv citizens is the uncovered and conserved Roman Theater, located between the hills Taximtepe and Djambaztepe. Its foundations were laid in the time of Emperor Trajan, between 108-114, as the Greek inscription on an unearthed frieze-architrave indicates. Later, of course, it underwent reconstructions. The theater existed till the end of the 4th century when it was burned down. This Temple of Melpomena seated 3500 (Fig. 3, 4). It consists of two floors of 14 tiers of marble seats each (a total of 28), divided by a horizontal aisle (diasome). This seating space (cavea) was built directly on the hill. The architectural design took advantage of the natural cone-shaped saddle. In many sectors under the seats the names of the local notables were inscribed, which so far number ten. Thus, the viewers knew their seats in advance. There were two entrances – east and west of the cavea. The playing space (orchestra) in front of the viewers was semicircular with a diameter of 27 m. Behind it was the three-floor stage (scene) (Fig. 5). At the two ends of the cavea there were rooms adapted for stairs to the upper floors of the scene (paraskenia). The theater was built under Hellenic Asia Minor influence, which was strong in the city. Plays from the rich ancient Greek repertory of tragedy and comedy were performed, as well

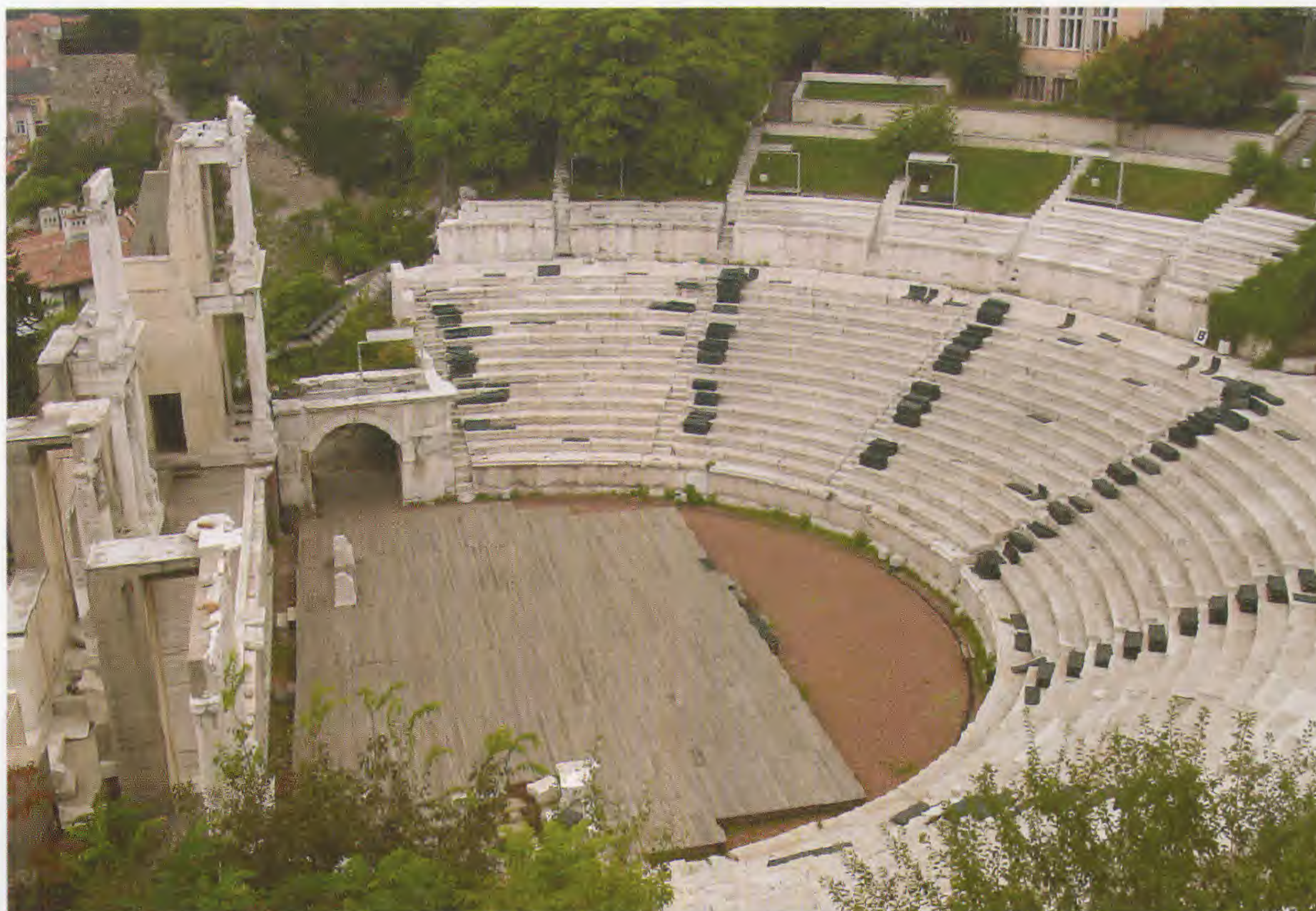


Fig.4 The Roman theater after partial restoration and conservation

as by Roman playwrights. Philippopolis was the chief venue of the Thracian people's assembly (Thracon koinon). The theater is believed to have been used for meetings of this important provincial body. Today drama, ballet, opera and operetta shows are organized in the restored theater during the warm months.

True to the motto "Panem et circenses" – "(Give the people) bread and circuses", the Roman administration ordered some constructional "improvements" to be made so as to use the theater fully. It was to be adapted for gladiatorial combats. As we know, the ancient Greeks loved sports and built stadiums, whereas the Romans went in for bloody enter-

tainment. Holes have been found in the parapet of the first row seats, which served to put up safety barriers and networks. An underground passage passed under the scene, proscene and the orchestra. A vertical shaft led to the surface of this orchestra. Inside must have been installed a hoisting device to lift animals (or gladiators) to the arena. In the back row there were other holes meant for standing iron poles, to which a skin or textile shed was attached to keep the audience from the sun and rain. The combats with wild animals and the gladiatorial games were free of charge in the Roman Empire. From Philippopolis we have several inscriptions, which mention gladiators. We learn their names, native parts,



*Fig.5 Part of the theater stage*



*Fig.6 The semicircular curved part of the Roman stadium with entrance underneath*

nicknames and triumphs. A tombstone bears the following text: "Here I lie, Victor the left-hander. My native place is Thessalonica. I was killed by some deity and not by the perjurer Pinas. But let not Pinas boast because my comrade-in-arms Polinic killed him and revenged me. Claudius Tallus erected this tombstone with the money Victor left."

A large stadium was built in Philippopolis, which rivaled the stadium in the capital Perinthos. It is next to the forum to the northwest, between the hills Taximtepe and Sahattepe. The stadium was most probably built around the middle of the 2nd century and existed till the reign of Constantine the Great (306-337). The northern semicircular

part of the facility has been uncovered with presently preserved 13-14 rows of marble seats, which are separated from the field level by a 1.80 m tall podium (Fig. 6). At places however the vertical aisles reach the field level. Recently, in another sector were explored straight-line rows along the longitudinal side of the stadium. This sports facility was on two floors and seated more than 20,000. Excavations also unearthed five tall marble pilasters – three of them bear images of Hermes, and two depict Heracles' attributes (crook, the skin of the Nemean Lion and a quiver). In 214 big sports competitions were organized here with the participation of professional athletes from different parts of the

province and outside of it. Pentathlon was on the program of the games. This included javelin, discus throwing, long jump, wrestling and the most spectacular and perilous contest – pankrateon – a mixture of boxing and wrestling. Everything was organized on behalf of the Thracian koinon on the occasion of the visit of Emperor Caracalla on his way to Asia Minor. The games were called Alexandria-Pythia in honor of Alexander the Great and were organized on the model of the Pythian Games in Delphi. This event was marked by the issuing of various emissions of bronze medallions and coins (Fig. 7). The Pythian Games were organized in the city again a little after the middle of the third century.

During the reign of Emperor Elagabal (Heliogabal – 218-222) in 218 the sports games in Philippopolis were renewed but now they were dedicated to the chief deity here – Apollo Kendrisos, and financed by the city administration. We learn of these big sport events not only from the coin emissions but also from the inscriptions found in the city. There were competitions for juniors and for men. Famous athletes came here from Thrace and the neighboring provinces. One tough athlete was 40 times winner in pankrateon (what we today call catch-as-catch-can) and 9 times in the Graeco-Roman style. In such contests were drawn lots. Little plates, couples of them bearing the same letter, were put in a silver cup. Those who drew the same letters played elimination matches. The stadium could have been used for gladiatorial games too.



Fig.7 Honorary medallions for the Alexandrian and Pythian Games in Philippopolis (photo K. Kolev)

## Religious tolerance accommodates the different

In the city there was a chief temple of the supreme Roman deity – Jupiter (Zeus). On certain holidays sacrifices were offered for the health and prosperity of the Emperor and the citizens of Philippopolis. The local Thracian population worshipped above all their Heros (Thracian Horseman), and Dionysus, who in fact originated in Thrace. In Philippopolis they honored the cult of Eumolp – a mythical Thracian king, after whom the settlement was originally called. Owing to the mixed ethnic composition of the population, deities from the Thraco-Hellenic mythology were wor-

shipped here. Apollo was the favorite. In time, however, he acquired the epithet **Kendrisos**, which is Thracian. The goddess **Bendida**, greatly worshipped in the area, was identified with the Greek **Artemis**. **Asclepius** and **Hygeia** were universally respected health-giving deities. **Heracles** was the personification of virility and strength. Archaeological explorations in Plovdiv have uncovered the ruins of an interesting cult building, which at the time was in the eastern quarters of the city. In the central room, the prayer hall, two mosaics were found one on top of the other. This shows that the building had undergone several reconstructions. The underlying mosaic, which chronologically precedes the upper one, is noteworthy. Two of the three panels of this work of art bear identical inscriptions in Greek. The text reads: "With the granted resources, thanks to the prudence of **Kosmian**, aka **Joseph**, decorate the synagogue and bless all." In the panel center a seven-candlestick and a menorah leaf are depicted. It is dated to the 3rd century AD, which indicates that at this time in **Philippopolis** there was a functioning Jewish community, whose citizens co-existed with Thracians and Greeks, Romans and immigrants from **Asia Minor**.

### **Health for the living, honor to the dead**

Undisputedly, one of the masterpieces of the stone plastics from Thrace is the so-called "Frieze of the Health-Giving Deities" from **Philippopolis** (Fig. 8). This element did not belong to an antique temple but was part of

the so-called "relief historical decoration" in Roman art. It was found by the eastern gate of the city, an area that is a triumphal-memorial complex. The left corner of the frieze represents an altar with the bust of the **Moon**, which bears the features of round sculpture and flanks the relief. It is believed that on the right stands **Faustina Junior** (wife of **Marcus Aurelius**), then the deities **Artemis**, **Telesphoros**, **Asclepius** and **Hygeia**. The woman with a kerchief on her head is the deceased **Faustina Senior** (wife of **Antoninus Pius**), and next to her are the **Dioscouri** brothers. The latter are identified with **Commodus** and one of his dead brothers – probably **Antoninus** (his twin brother). The presence of a dog facing the figure on the right indicates not so much the **Dioscouri** as patrons of hunting but rather points to the dead child. The presence of the health-giving deities expresses wishes for health. The sculpture composition is dated to 175, before the fall, when **Faustina Junior** died too. A little later, en route from **Syria** to **Rome**, the imperial family crossed **Thrace** and most probably visited **Philippopolis**. There is yet another reason for the presence of the **Dioscouri** in the scene – the festive games in their honor were often organized by representatives of the **Antonine** dynasty, and especially by **Commodus**.

### **The death of the brave**

In the late spring of 250 the **Goths**, headed by their leader **Kniva**, crossed the **Danube** via four sectors and invaded **Lower Moesia**. Their aim however was to cross the **Balkan Range**



Fig.8 The frieze with health-bringing deities from the eastern gate of Philippopolis (Museum of Archaeology, Plovdiv)

and take Philippopolis, the richest city in these parts. Emperor Decius Traianus (249-251) personally arrived in the Moesian lands. When the Goths finally reached the walls of the coveted city, Decius was recruiting an army to stop them. For the first time in centuries, the City of Philip was exposed to a deadly peril. Decius wrote an encouraging letter to the governor Priscus. Historian Dexippos noted that Priscus gathered the men in the large stadium, which was inside the fortress. The Emperor advised the citizens to stay behind the thick fortified walls and not to rush into battle outside. He gave them courage, trusting in their selflessness. The Goths went round Philippopolis and noted its weak points. They launched battle accordingly and brought siege machines. After a prolonged siege, Philippopolis fell. According to an ancient report, there was a betrayal on the inside, although the local population fought to the last. The city was burned down, many died, while others were taken

captive. The loot was loaded on hundreds of carts. Kniva decided to retreat to the Danube at Durostorum (Silistra), but Decius intercepted him at Abritus (Razgrad). There the Emperor died in the battlefield.

### **The counter council**

With the establishment of Christianity, Philippopolis became a principal spiritual center of Thrace. In 343 the council of the orthodox faith was convened in Serdica. Simultaneously in Philippopolis a counter-council was held. It was attended by followers of Arianism. Recently in Plovdiv was discovered an Episcopal basilica, which with its length of 50 m is one of the largest in the diocese of Thrace. It is three-nave and one-apse, with mosaic flooring. It functioned during the 5th - 6th c. Two smaller basilicas and a martyrion have been established within the city perimeter.

# DIOCLETIANOPOLIS

## Hissarya

*"In the Thrace province, ruled by a hegemon, there are five cities – Philippopolis, Beroe, Diocletianopolis, Sevastopolis and Diospolis"*

(Hierocles, *Vade mecum*, 635)



Fig. 1 Plan of Diocletianopolis (after K. Madjarov)

### The hot springs at the foot of Sredna Gora

Some 42 km away from Philippopolis (Plovdiv) are situated the imposing ruins of the city of Diocletianopolis (Hissarya). This is in a small valley at the southern foot of Sredna

Gora. In the area have been established 22 curative mineral springs, of total debit 4500 liters per second. The earliest inhabitants came here in the 5th millennium BC, attracted by the mild temperate-continental climate, the proximity of the mountain, the fertile fields and plenty of curative water. A Thracian tribe settled in the rich land during the New Iron Age. In the Roman period a settlement sprang up here, the name of which is uncertain. Perhaps it was called Augusta. It was destroyed during the Goths' invasions in 250-251 AD. Soon after, during the reign of Emperor Diocletian (284-305) a new city was built which was among the five biggest cities in the province of Thrace (Fig. 1).

### The Camels

The city, which already bore the name of the Emperor, was surrounded by inaccessible stonewalls 2328 m long, reinforced by 44 protruding towers (Fig. 2, 3). The encompassed city area was 30 ha. Of the four large gates best preserved today is the southern gate, which tourists call The Camels (Fig. 4). Parts of the stone-brick wall at its top resemble the



*Fig.2 Part of the fortress with tall preserved walls  
(photo M. Madjarov)*

humps of a camel. Today this is a landmark of Hissarya. A street still passes through the gates and leads to the old part of the resort town (Hissar). After the fortified wall was constructed, barracks for the local garrison were built inside the wall (Fig. 5). Since the beginning of the 4th century the city was inhabited by a mixed military-civilian population, which defended the city by common efforts. The northern side was more vulnerable, therefore in the 5th century the citizens built in front of it a second parallel wall (proteichisma) (Fig. 6). The distance between the two was 10 m. This made the defense more secure. The city was surrounded with a deep moat on the northern, eastern and southern side. Diocletianopolis withstood the Gothic inva-



*Fig.3 Part of the fortress wall viewed from the interior  
(photo St. Boyadjiev)*



Fig.4 The southern gate "The Camels" (photo St. Boyadjiev)

sion in 376-378, but fell under the Huns in the first quarter of the fifth century. Then it resisted the Avars in 587 but a few years later it was conquered by the Slavs and never recovered.

### The resort town

Archaeological investigations, although hindered by the present-day buildings, show that Diocletianopolis was made up of solid public and private buildings. The two main streets have been uncovered – *cardo maximus*, with a bed of up to 11 m, and *decumanus maximus*. At the present-day mineral spring Toplitsa (previously Hlavuza) a



Fig.5 The southern wall with the barracks on the inside (photo St. Boyadjiev)



Fig.6 The northern wall with the proteichism  
(photo M. Madjarov)



large late Roman bath has been explored, which is equipped with all basic premises for the therapeutic procedure. In the building were found many votive tablets to the health-giving deities Asclepius, Hygeia and Telesphoros, which is quite natural for such a healthy city. There is a curious inscription in Latin, giving instructions as to how to cool the boiling spring water and how to deodorize it. Another, smaller bathing establishment was localized at the present-day bathing complex Rusalka. The interesting thing here is the inscription in one of the brick layers of the building. Analysis of the epigraphic monument showed that the bath was constructed between November 11 and December 31, 308, when there were two emperors in the Empire – Maximilian Galerius and Licinius. Doubtlessly, there were many more balnea in the city, but undiscovered until now because this area of Hissarya is densely built up.

Right next to the large baths stood an impressive two-storied public building of parameters 68 x 42 m. It is believed to have accommodated wealthy visitors-holidaymakers of high social status, who used the baths next door. The bedrooms and guestrooms were on the upper floor, while on the ground floor there were shops and storerooms.

Three spacious private houses have also been explored. They were built in the traditional Roman style, with a courtyard in the middle, a colonnade and behind it – the living-rooms, bedrooms, servants' and farming premises. Not far from the southern fortress wall a storehouse for grain has been discovered. It stored part of the grain reserve that Diocletianopolis would need in a critical situation.

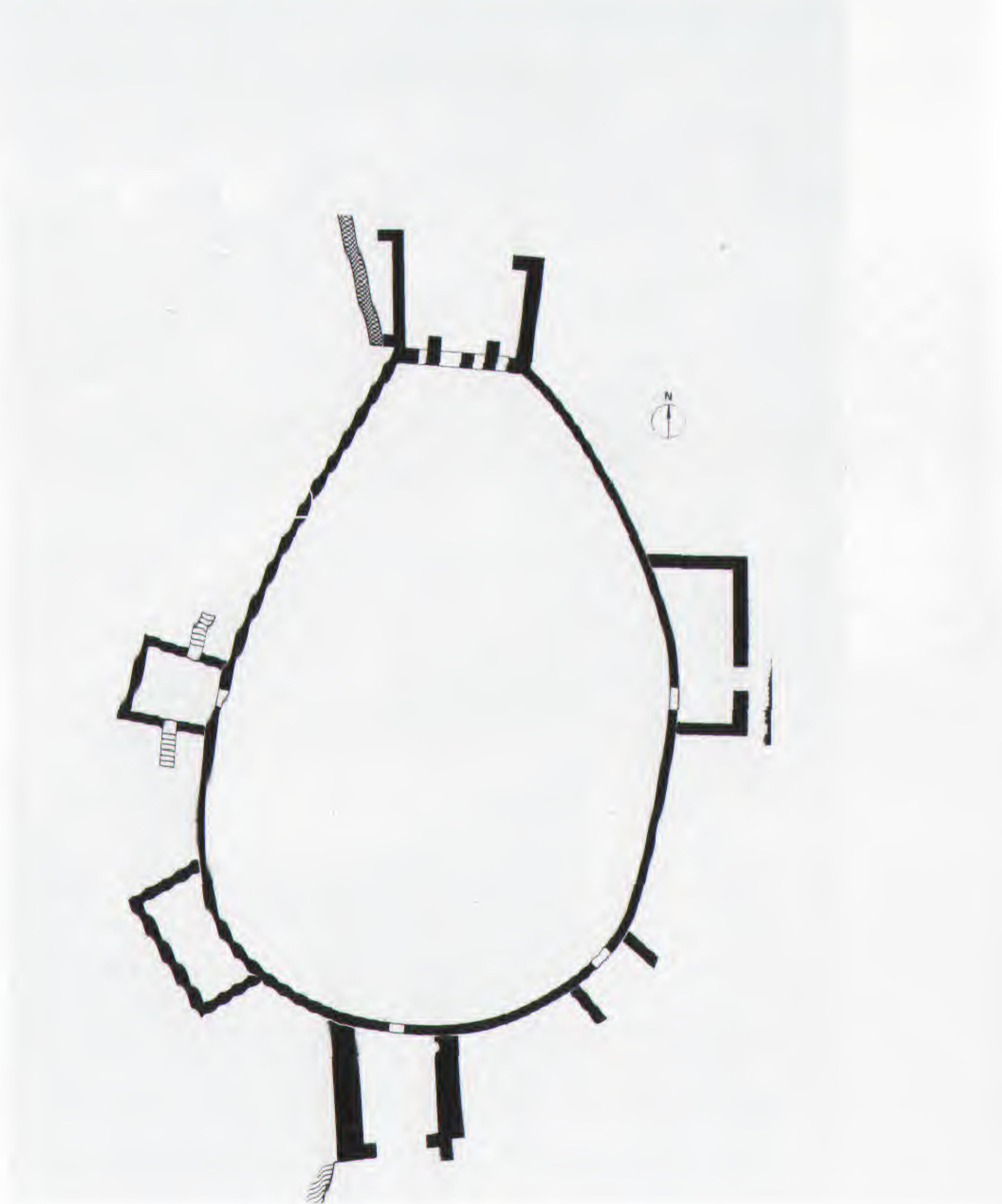
For the normal course of everyday life and the resort season, a high-grade water supply and sewerage system was constructed. Cold and pure drinking water was brought from the southern slopes of Sredna Gora. The hot water was drinkable and was curative for stomach and kidney disorders.

### **Christianity contradicts bloody entertainment**

With the establishment of the orthodox faith, numerous basilicas were built in the area; over 10 have been found so far. Many of them were erected on the ruins of pagan sanctuaries and temples. A bishop was resident here, subordinated to the Metropolitan of Philippopolis.

In the southwestern part of Diocletianopolis was uncovered a not big amphitheater (Fig. 7). It was built in the time of

Constantine the Great (306-337) and after 325 it was not used for gladiator's combats, because these were banned in the Eastern Empire. Various spectacles and attractive wrestles with trained animals took place here for the entertainment of the garrison, the civilian population and the numerous holidaymakers. The amphitheater was made of stone and timber. For part of the wooden seats the natural slope of the terrain was used. The long axis of the elliptic arena is 39 m (north-south), and the short axis is 24 m. The arena was accessed through two arched passages, from the north and the south. Staff rooms have been found contiguous to the building. The amphitheater of Diocletianopolis is a common provincial small-size place of entertainment.



*Fig. 7 Plan of the amphitheater (after K. Madjarov)*

# BEROE – AUGUSTA TRAIANA

## Stara Zagora

### The city of trades

Stara Zagora is situated at the southern foot of Sarnena Gora, part of the Sredna Gora mountain. At this site there was a Thracian settlement Beroe, around which in the early 2nd century AD the Roman city of Augusta Traiana was built. In the written sources, however, the Latin name did not gain currency. The city was mentioned as Beroia, Berone, Beroe, and later as Vereia (Fig. 1). From the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-180) to Gallien (253-268) the city was entitled to mint coins. This was a time of peaceful life in Thrace and many of the cities flourished (2nd century – first half of 3rd century). For the needs of the market economy numerous workshops were set up for the production of metal, wooden and glass articles, and jewelry. Augusta Traiana became famous throughout the province with its bronze products: statuettes, medallions, mirrors, vessels, toilet boxes, appliques for carts and chariots (Fig. 2). Local mosaicists made various kinds of floor mosaics with interesting subjects. Today color mosaics have been found at many places in public and wealthy residential buildings. On the one hand, they are indicative of a local school, and on the other, they are exponents

*"Thrace is adorned by the big cities of Philippopolis, i.e. the old Eumolpiada, and Beroe"*

(Ammianus Marcellinus, XXVII,12)



Fig.1 Beroe – Augusta Traiana denoted as Berone on the Peutingerian map (after Ulrich Harsch, 2000 – Tabula Peutingeriana)



Fig.2 Bronze statuette of Apollo  
(Archaeological Institute with Museum, Sofia ) (photo Kr. Georgiev)

of subjects typical for the provinces of the Roman Empire in this area. Builders from the city and its surroundings laid water pipelines and made beautiful fountains. One of these is a piece of art – in its upper part it had a statuette of a reclining nude boy. Stonecutters cut slabs for the street pavement, architectural elements, statues and tombstones. The construction of the solid stone wall required work force at the quarries and stonecutting shops.

### **Priestesses in charge of important cults in the city**

The city was organized on the model of the Hellenic poleis and had its local government. This was the city council (boule) and the people's assembly (demos) of the inhabitants of Augusta Traiana. The first archon (municipal councilor) headed the college of councilors, where each councilor was responsible for different economic and judicial activities. Among the city elite were elected patrons (chairmen) of various associations and public organizations. Some were members of the Thracian Assembly (Koinon ton Thrakon). The high priests played an important role in the religious life of the city. So far 14 such priests are known, of whom 4 are women. This was a great honor to the female sex in Augusta Traiana. There are single instances in Nicopolis ad Istrum, Serdica, Pautalia, Philippopolis, but here they were multiple. Four of the male high priests were of Thracian descent.

From the city and its environs originate many cult monuments, which demonstrate



Fig.3 The ruins of the square and the thermae at the western gate of the city (after *History of Bulgaria*, 1979)

the religious concepts and beliefs of the population. The local Thracians worshipped the Heros (Thracian Horseman), and the deities of mixed adoration: Bendida-Artemis, Zeus-Sbelsurdos, Asclepius-Darsos. Here again the Hellenic influence was strong, most numerous being the dedications to Zeus, Hera, Apollo, Demetra. Roman veteran soldiers settled in Augusta Traiana and its urban territory, who honored their own cults (Jupiter, Victoria, Concordia, Nemesida). The arrival of immigrants from the East brought the cult of Jupiter Dolichenos, Sabasius, Isida, Sarapis, Harpocritos.

The population was heterogeneous, which added color to the everyday life and the diversity in religion and the artistic crafts.

### **The bloody square**

The city was fortified with a stone wall after the invasion of the Costoboci in 170. This happened during the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180). The citizens stood out the attacks of the Goths in the middle of the 3rd century. Hard times came in a little more than a century later. The Goths brought devastation in 376-378, then the Huns in the first half of

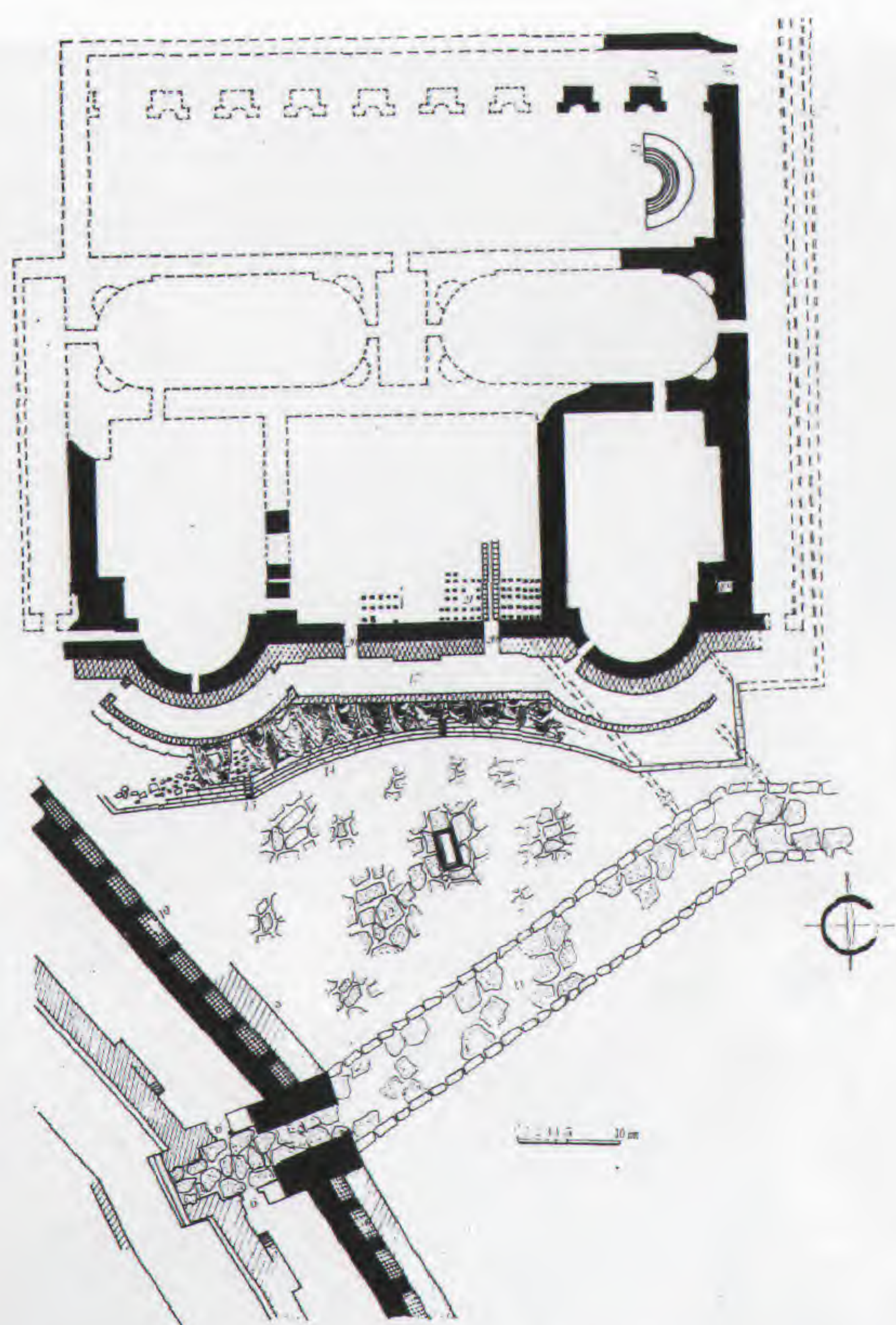


Fig.4 Plan of the square and the thermae at the western gate (after D. Nikolov)

the fifth century. A second parallel wall (proteichisma) was built in front of the existing wall. Emperor Justinian the Great (527-565) reconstructed the city and its walls, and in 778 similar measures were taken by the Byzantine Empress Irina. Then for a while the medieval Vereia was renamed Irinopolis.

The key gate of the city was the western gate, from which a road led to the large city of Philippopolis. At the gate there was an oval square (Fig. 3, 4). Initially it hosted workshops but later became a marketplace. Gradually marble seats were made on both sides of the street, leading to the gate, to form a sort of a small amphitheater. On certain days, bloody

spectacles took place in the stone-paved square. The gate was closed, and the street and pavement around it was used as arena. In front of the first row of marble seats, wooden beams were put in rabbets for the construction of a safety parapet of nets. After the prohibition of this sort of games by Constantine the Great, a statue was erected in the center of the square, probably to him. During excavations in Stara Zagora extensive evidence of gladiatorial games has been found. Marble blocks with embossments of gladiatorial combats and tombstones of combatants who died in the arena (Fig. 5). Sports races were also organized in the city. The local administration raised a statue to the athlete and wrestler Aurelius Fronton, while still living, who had brought fame to the city with his strength. During archaeological investigations in Stara Zagora have been found numerous strigiles (crescent-shaped metal objects for removing the sand and sweat from the body) and balsamaria for fragrance oils – attributes of the wrestler-athletes.

The local aristocracy often visited the theater. Judging by an inscription, there was a theater in Augusta Traiana. Apart from Greek and Roman plays, the local troupe performed pantomimes.

### **The thermae – a place of entertainment**

North of the square, there were thermae built over an area of 6500 sq. m of almost square layout, of 80 m long sides. Eight big premises have been found. The passages and



Fig.5 Marble slab depicting a gladiatorial combat (Archaeological Institute with Museum, Sofia ) (photo Kr. Georgiev)

the vestibule were for common use and then the rooms were divided for men and for women. The city aristocracy however hardly used these spacious baths. Ten Roman miles northwest of Augusta Traiana there was a large "resort" bathing complex, the present-day Stara Zagora Mineral Baths. An inscription was found saying the thermae were built in 162-163. The dedication is to the nymph goddesses, protectors of the hot mineral springs and baths, as well as of the city Augusta Traiana, for whose citizens the baths were intended. The first priest and priestess of the city, a couple from Nicomedia in Asia Minor, financed the construction of the complex. The city aristocracy, as in other provincial cities, spent most of their time at their out-of-town estates. The residences of many of these wealthy people were in the environs and the visits to the mineral complex by carriage were doubtlessly a great pleasure for the whole family.

### Donors erect cult and public buildings

Many of the ancient buildings in Augusta Traiana have not been uncovered yet, because they lie under the central zone of Stara Zagora. From the quite a few discovered inscriptions however we learn when, how and what was erected by the local master-builders. Thus we learn that the high priest Marcus Aurelius Asiaticus raised a 66-column portico, and a temple – Dikeion with 35 columns. Dike was the goddess of justice and daughter of Zeus and Themis. In the time of the Emperor Septimius Severus (193-211) veteran soldiers from the 30th Ulpian Legion, founded by Trajan, settled here. The veterans raised funds and built an Augusteum (temple of Augustus, personification of the Emperor). In the center of the ancient city there were also a temple of the goddess Roma, gymnasium for training and physical exercise of the rich youths, gerusia (cult organization). Here

rose the building of the Thracian koinon (people's assembly), which apart from Philippopolis could be convened in other big cities of the province.

### **The role of the mayors**

The city had a large urban territory. To the north it extended beyond the Balkan Range and at the border with the lands of Nicopolis ad Istrum there was a marketplace (emporion), outside the Thracian village of Discoduraterae (Gostilitsa village near Dryanovo). The second market center was southwest of the city, by the village of Pizos (now near Dimitrievo village). From here originates a very valuable inscription in Ancient Greek of 202 (the reign of Emperor Septimius Severus – 193-211). The inscription starts with the legitimization of this marketplace. Then follow the names of 160 men, heads of family, who settled here. They came from nine Thracian villages in the district. Then the text of the decree of the provincial governor of Thrace Quintus Clarus was inscribed. It explained that in the lead stood the village mayors, called toparchoi. They should be fair and condescending and by no means supercilious or using force. The justice in the emporion was entrusted to them. Finally, it is mentioned that the mayors alone should pick out good peasant families and settle them here. In exchange, the peasants shall be exempted from certain duties, such as payment in kind of contributions to Augusta Traiana, maintenance of the road mail in the district, and serving guard at the road fortifications (burgi).

Through Augusta Traiana passed the major provincial road Philippopolis – Cabyle (near Yambol) – Aquae Calidae (the Burgas baths) and Anchialos (Pomorie). A road across the Balkan Range connected the city with Nicopolis ad Istrum, and at Cabyle there was a branch road to Hadrianopolis (Edirne).

### **Beroe bishop becomes Patriarch of the Eastern Empire**

With the establishment of Christianity, Beroe – Augusta Traiana became a principal religious center in Thrace. A local bishop took part in the Serdica Council and stood against the Philippopolis conspirators. In 355 the Roman Pope Liberius was temporarily exiled to Beroe. Several years later, Bishop Demophil climbed to the highest rank in the capital city of Constantinople – he became Patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

In the late 4th century in this Christian city there is evidence of the existence of a nunnery. In the space of the large thermae at the western gate was put up a small church. East of the city walls a martyrium was explored, which had later grown into a tomb church. In one of the tombs, with dark-red murals, an Ancient Greek inscription contains a psalm from the Old Testament: "Let this be my eternal place of rest. Here I want to live, as I desired. Lord, have mercy on us. God is with us."

# MESAMBRIA PONTICA

## Nessebar

*"Mesambria is my native town, from Melsa and 'bria'"*

Plaque of Julia, daughter of Nikios, 2nd c. AD

### The Thracian ruler Melsa

Nicholas of Damascus and Stephan of Byzantine mention that long before them Strabo was the first to write about the city of Mesambria on the Pontic (Black) Sea. The name was derived from two words – Melsa, the name of the Thracian ruler of these lands, and "bria" which in the local language meant "city". Perhaps initially the settlement was

called Melsambria (the City of Melsa), and later the Greeks altered it to Mesambria. The Thracian city was built on the present-day Nessebar peninsula and occupied an area of 40 hectares. In the course of time, more than 10 ha have been engulfed by the sea (Fig. 1). Remnants from this ancient settlement are located in the northern and northwestern part of the peninsula.



Fig.1 The Nessebar peninsula nowadays

## The Dorian settlers come

The Hellenic colony here was founded around 510 BC. The first settlers were Dorians, mainly from the cities of Megara, Chalcedon and Byzantion. They were in search of new lands because the Persian King Darius I marched with a huge army and conquered the Asia Minor city-colonies, then crossed the western coast of Pontus and headed for the Scythians' lands to the north. Over the years, the city-colony marked ever greater economic prosperity. Since the middle of the 5th century BC silver and bronze coins were minted here. Later, when the city was under Roman control, it again minted its own coins in the period between the reign of the Emperors Hadrian (117-138) and Philip the Arab (244-249). Ancient Greek was the written language here, as shown by the numerous inscriptions with various contents that have been found. During the Hellenistic era the city was probably affected by the incursions of Philip II of Macedon. Later the Mesambrians were on the side of the polis Callatis (Mangalia) against Lisimah. The Dorian colony set up its marketplaces in the area – near Obzor and Bizone. Mesambria served as a mediation zone between the Hellenic world and the Thracians in the interior. The city sided with Mithridat VI against Rome. In 72-71 BC, however, the legions of Marcus Lucullus conquered the Greek poleis on the western Black Sea coast. Before long Mesambria was within the bounds of the Roman province of Macedonia (temporarily), then of Moesia, and since the reign of Emperor Septimius Severus (193-211) – within Thrace.

## The city of centuries-long history

Today the Nessebar peninsula is an open city-museum, which immerses us in the time when it was inhabited by Thracians and Greeks, Romans and Byzantines, Bulgarians and Turks. In the middle of the 4th century BC the Mesambrians erected a strong stonewall, which surrounded the entire peninsula. The only gate was on the west, where the peninsula was linked to the mainland. The fortification system was frequently repaired and reconstructed by Greeks, Romans and Byzantines (Fig. 2, 3, 4). In the central area, on the highest terrace was the city square (agora). Here stood the temples of the chief Greek god Zeus and the chief deity – patron



Fig.2 The city gate (view from the west)

of the city – Apollo. The city was engaged in lively marine trade. Therefore two ports were made – one in the northern part with a second temple of Zeus, and another in the southern part where a second temple of Apollo was built. There were many more temples and sanctuaries of Asclepius, Hekate, Isida, Sarapis, Dionysus. Particularly revered was the chief Thracian god Heros (the Thracian Horseman). Within the fortress walls there was a theater, frequented by the local aristocracy. During the Roman period Mesambria fell a bit behind Anchialos. But with the establishment of the Eastern Roman Empire and the growth of Byzantium (Constantinople), the importance of this Black Sea region grew immensely owing to its proximity to the



*Fig.3 Part of the fortress wall of Mesambria*

megapolis. The city was now called Mesamvria and was a major center of Christianity. On the site of the city square, a large three-nave basilica of St. Sofia was erected, now known as the Great Metropolitan Basilica. It was the most impressive cult building in the 5th - 6th centuries (Fig. 5, 6). In the northeastern part of the city stood the Mother of God Eleusa Basilica, now



*Fig.4 Early Byzantine pentagonal tower (5th–6th c.)*

*Fig.5 St. Sofia Basilica (the Great Metropolitan Basilica),  
view from the west (photo T. Parashkevova)*

known as the Marine Basilica. It was also a three-nave basilica with semicircular apses (Fig. 7). With the adoption of the orthodox faith, early Christian churches were built on many of the ancient temples. Thus, on the seaport temples were erected Christian cult buildings. Many of the medieval churches in Nessebar were put up on the site of older churches or with materials thereof. A small square with a colonnade was set up by the western gate. In the lowest part of the peninsula, under the Turkish hamam (bath) there were large early Byzantine thermae with spacious bathing premises, a big hall and a pool.





*Fig.6 St. Sofia Basilica (view from the north)  
(photo T. Parashkevova)*



## **Today Nessebar and Sozopol are burying the hatchet**

In recent years, the mass media often covered the meetings of the city councils of Nessebar and Sozopol. The curious tourists learn that an end has been put to the enmity between these two most famous resorts in the territory of Burgas region. Few people however know that this hostility does not originate in the last decades as a consequence of tourism competition. This enmity has a millennial history. What happened in antiquity? Apollonia Pontica (Sozopol) is the oldest Greek colony on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. It was founded by Ionian settlers from Asia Minor in 610 BC. One century later



Fig. 7 The ruins of the Mother of God Eleusa Basilica

the Dorians founded Mesambria. Rivalry was already there when the Apollonians founded another smaller colony Anchialos (Pomorie) a little more than 10 km south of Mesambria. There they extracted salt, an essential commodity at the time. In the 2nd century BC the hatred grew stronger. The powerful Mesambrian fleet seized Anchialos and laid a hand on the salt-mines. The warships went on to Apollonia and disembarked on the island of the famous Statue of Apollo. The

Apollonians however called to their help their Ionian neighbors from Histria, a city on the Danube delta, and the two fleets prevailed over the Mesambrians and won the war.

### **Mesamvria and Danubian Bulgaria**

In 680-681 Khan Asparuh's Bulgarians settled in the locality of Ongala, not far from the Danube delta. Byzantium sent a large army by sea and land. Emperor Constantine IV himself with his suite crossed the Black Sea to vanquish personally the invading proto-Bulgarians. According to Byzantine chroniclers, the Bulgarians applied a wait-and-see tactics and did not engage in a general battle. This made the Byzantines nervous and meanwhile the Emperor felt unwell. He left urgently for Mesamvria to have curative mud-baths there (or in the neighborhood). The Byzantine soldiers learned that Constantine had left them and lost their spirit. The Bulgarians suddenly counterattacked and repulsed them. Thus in 681 Danubian Bulgaria was founded. Mesamvria remained within the boundaries of the Byzantine Empire. But in 812 the Bulgarian Khan Krum (803-814) seized the city, destroyed part of it owing to its resistance, and annexed it to the Bulgarian state. Until the end of the 14th century, when the Balkans were finally conquered by the Ottoman Turks, the struggle between Bulgarians and Byzantines over Mesambria was incessant and the city often changed hands.

# PAUTALIA

## Kyustendil

*"In the province of Mediterranean Dacia there were five cities:  
Serdica – chief city, Pautalia, Germania, Naissus and Remesiana"*

(Hierocles, *Vade mecum*, 14)

### **King Rhesos under the walls of Troy**

It was the tenth year of the blood-shedding Trojan War. The gods were still arguing whom the victory should be given to. The Thracian King Strymon sent his son Rhesos to Troy, to help the besieged city. Homer describes him in the Iliad as tall and handsome, resembling a god rather than a mortal. His horses were whiter than snow. The exhausted Thracians set up a temporary camp under the walls of the ancient Troy. They fell into a heavy sleep and did not notice the cunning Odysseus and Diomedes sneaking in the dark. These stabbed the throats of a dozen men, and the thirteenth was Rhesos himself. Hearing the terrible news, Strymon threw himself in the nearby river and since then it bore his name. This river is now called Struma. Struma passes near Pautalia (today's Kyustendil) in its upper reaches. This place was a center of the Thracian strategy Dentheletika (Dantheletika).

### **Marcus Licinius Crassus "helps" the Dentheletai (Dantheletai)**

In 29 BC Bastarnae and Dacians on the off side of the Danube crossed the frozen river and went far south in search of a new place for

living. Thus they came to the present-day Kyustendil plain, which had long been inhabited by the Dentheletai tribe. Marcus Crassus, governor of the Roman province of Macedonia, was just waiting for an excuse to invade the Thracian lands. He informed the leader of the Dentheletai that he was coming to their aid. Crassus marched into the fertile land and chased the newcomers away to the Danube. On the way back he passed through the same lands to make them a Roman dominion. Somewhere under the present-day Kyustendil we should be looking for the chief settlement of the tribe that inhabited the region in the Old Iron Age till the arrival of the Romans. The environment was wonderful – Struma river and its tributary Banshtitsa, the Hissarlak hill, part of the Osogovo Mountain, hot mineral springs and numerous ore deposits.

In 45 these parts fell within the southwestern boundaries of the Roman province of Thrace, and during the reign of Trajan (98-117) the urbanization of Pautalia started.

### **Ulpia Pautalia**

The city was built at the foot of the Hissarlak hill. It was a major station on the



Fig.1 The thermae in Pautalia – part of the ground floor (Regional Museum of History, Kyustendil, archives)

route from Serdica (Sofia) to Stobi in Macedonia, with a side road to Thessalonica. There was a branch road to Sapareva Banya in the direction of Philippopolis. In the time of Marcus Aurelius (161-180) the ancient city was equipped with a stonewall and strong towers. In the 2nd - 4th centuries the enclosed area was about 30 hectares. Under the center of present-day Kyustendil lied the city agora (square). Several sectors of the street network have been explored. Some streets reach a width of 12-13 meters (including the sidewalks). Water was brought from several springs but the biggest was near the Hissarlak and the Osogovo Mountain to the south. A Greek inscription from 135 AD (the time of Emperor Antoninus Pius) tells us about the construction of a civil basilica. The basilica in Ulpia Oescus was built the same year. Another inscription tells us that here there was a gymnasium for training youths. They also



Fig.2 The floor level and the subterranean vaulted construction of the thermae (Regional Museum of History, Kyustendil, archives)

practiced sports indoors, as we learn from an epigraphic monument mentioning the name of the instructor.

Among the most important investigated buildings in Pautalia are the Roman thermae, located in the southeastern part of the city. The building layout is rectangular and its floorage is over 3000 sq. m (Fig. 1, 2). Probably it is part of a larger complex comprising the asclepion at the medicinal spring, the gymnasium and the sports school. The uncovered parts of an apodyterium, tepidarium and caldarium have a hypocaust system with columns and arcade, as well as radiant wall heating (Fig. 3, 4). The ceilings and floors of the rooms are covered with marble slates and



Fig.3 Arcade-vaulted construction under the ground floor of the thermæ (Regional Museum of History, Kyustendil, archives)

have a rich architectural decoration of cornices and pilasters. To the north, the ruins of a second small bath, which also used mineral water, were investigated. South of one of the east-west streets (decumanus 1) were situated shops with an inner court which served as a marketplace. Similar shops were also found in a north-south street (cardo 1). Next to the eastern fortress wall was uncovered a horreum, public storehouse for grain.

From the end of the 3rd century Pautalia was part of the newly founded province of Mediterranean Dacia with capital Serdica. With the establishment of Christianity, many basilicas were built here. Near the northern wall and not faraway west of the city square an architectural complex has been investigated, which comprises two public buildings and two early Christian basilicas. The second basilica is of special interest. It is a three-nave, one-apse basilica with a narthex and a transept. The polychromatic floor mosaic features geometric and plant ornaments of circles, squares, rhombs and octagons with depictions of birds, ducks, baskets of flowers, a running dog, fish,



Fig.4 Subterranean room with brick bases for hypocaust props (photo T. Yordanov)

a pear-tree. The stylistic features of the mosaic and the basilica layout date it to the first years of the fifth century.

Pautalia was organized on the model of the Asia Minor urban centers. The government was concentrated in the hands of the city council (boule) and the archons, while the people's assembly (demos) had an advisory nature. The official Roman state and imperial cult was served by a special college of priests, headed by a prelate.

Another college of priests took care of the cult of the deities in the Greco-Roman pantheon. The sacral area was concentrated at the foot of the Hissarlak hill. Among the trees rose temples and sanctuaries depicted on the



Fig.5 Marble votive tablet of Asclepius, Hygeia and Telesphoros (2nd-3rd c.) (Regional Museum of History, Kyustendil)



Fig.6 Votive tablet of the health-giving god Asclepius (2nd-3rd c.) (Regional Museum of History, Kyustendil)



Fig.7 Marble relief of Dionysus (2nd-3rd c.) (Regional Museum of History, Kyustendil)

**Pautalian coins.** The chief temple of Pautalia with a statue of Asclepius, the medicinal spring – personification of the river Strimon. Here there were appointed agoranomi, market supervisors.

On the many discovered inscriptions we find Thracian, Greek and Latin names of individuals. Apart from the health-giving deities Asclepius, Hygeia and Telesphoros (Fig. 5, 6), here were worshipped Zeus and Hera, the Thracian Horseman, Dionysus (Fig. 7), Hermes, Aphrodite. This is evident from their stamping on the Pautalian bronze coins, which the city was allowed to mint between the reign of Antoninus Pius (138-161) and Caracalla (211-217). And when Emperor Septimius Sever (193-211) and his family came to visit Pautalia it was only natural to



*Fig.8 The southern wall on the Hissarlak hill*

emit a special emission.

In the late antiquity (end of 4th - 6th c.) a stone fortification was built on the Hissarlak hill, which occupied an area of 2.12 hectares (Fig. 8).

From the epigraphic monuments and the rescue archaeological excavations conducted in Kyustendil we learn of the different professions and trades in Roman Pautalia. Namely: retail dealer, cook, innkeeper, tailor of tent skins, sculptor, jurist. One inscription bears the names of the architects Laomedon and Glaukias. Many potter's workshops were set up for common earthenware and fine table



*Fig.9 Bust of Pan, bronze chariot applique (Regional Museum of History, Kyustendil)*

ceramics. The long nights required clay lamps, which imitated the basic types of the period. A lamp mould was uncovered, which is evidence of local production. Large workshops produced mass building ceramics such as bricks, roof tiles and tubes, to meet the demands of the growing urbanization of this center on the upper Struma.

Augusta Traiana and Pautalia are so far the two cities in the present-day Bulgarian lands, which feature developed local bronze production. Doubtlessly, the ore deposits in the vicinity were an important factor. The casts were primarily bronze appliques for chariots and

carts (usually busts of the gods Apollo, Athena, Heracles, Pan, Eros, the river god Strimon, etc.) (Fig. 9), statuettes (Fig. 10) and vessels.

A large stonecutting workshop functioned in the city for the needs of construction and interior decoration. This is evident from the strong stonewalls built in the lowland and up on the Hissarlak, from the uncovered ruins of private, public and cult edifices (bases, capitals, columns, friezes, frontons), from the street pavement. An inscription tells us about marble working. Big and smaller statues were made, as well as votive tablets with the images of Asclepius-Hygeia-Telesphoros, Zeus and Hera, Apollo, Heracles. The mosaic art also flourished in the city. A multitude of black-and-white and polychrome floor mosaics have been found during archaeological excavations, which are indicative of local ateliers for their laying.

### Peasants complain to Emperor

Within the territory of Pautalia was the fortress of Germania (present-day Sapareva Banya). The name derives from a Thracian word (*geermes*) meaning "warm, hot". This is the site of the only geyser in the country. Germania is the birthplace of Velisarius, general of Emperor Justinian the Great (527-565). In the southernmost part of the Pautalian territory, in the direction of Blagoevgrad, was the Thracian village of Skaptopara. Its inhabitants had become quite affluent – the land was good, the mineral baths were visited by many, and the local fair gathered a lot of people. However, the peasants began to suffer losses from the provincial officials and some military

men, especially during the bathing procedures or at the marketplace. These did not pay anything for food or entrance. An inscription found in Gramada quarters (Blagoevgrad) contains their appeal to Emperor Gordian III (238-244). The document was written by a Pautalian defense lawyer, dealing with disputes in the province. The inhabitants mentioned that if they were not rendered help, they would leave this place for good.



Fig.10 Bronze statuette of Hera (2nd-3rd c.)  
(Regional Museum of History, Kyustendil)

# NICOPOLIS AD NESTUM

## Garmen village, near Gotse Delchev

### The bizarre named city in the pretty valley

Emperor Marcus Ulpius Trajan conquered the stubborn Dacians in 106 and founded the province of Dacia. But there was no city called "Victory City" there. So, he founded Tropaeum Traiani (Trajan's Trophy) (at Adamclisi village, Constanta region in North Dobrudja) and erected an impressive memorial complex in memory of the perished Roman legions. Its location however was in Lower Moesia. Then he founded Nicopolis ad Istrum and Marcianopolis, called after his sister. These

two cities then lied within the province of Thrace. In the south-westernmost parts of the province, near Macedonia and Achaia, was constructed Nicopolis ad Nestum or Mestum, which in translation means "City of the victory at Mesta river". Trajan has not fought battles in this region and this name is a little perplexing. Today the ruins of Nicopolis ad Nestum can be seen at Garmen village, 7 km northeast of the town of Gotse Delchev, not far away from the present-day Bulgarian-Greek border. In contrast to the garrisons and civilian settlements on the right bank of the Danube, where the climate was harshly continental, here the natural conditions were wonderful – mild winter, warm summer, pleasant spring and autumn.

### The city ruins after barbarian invasions and an earthquake

The geographer Claudius Ptolemaeus from Alexandria in Egypt mentions Nicopolis on the river Nestum among the inland cities of the Thracian province. Across the fertile valley passed the important road from Philippopolis to the Aegean Sea. The area enclosed by the city walls was 12 hectares, and its shape was polygonal. Initially the settlement did not have a stonewall as it was situated in an interior land, unlike the right bank of the Danube, where the hazard of barbarian invasions was very high. The city was fortified as late as the

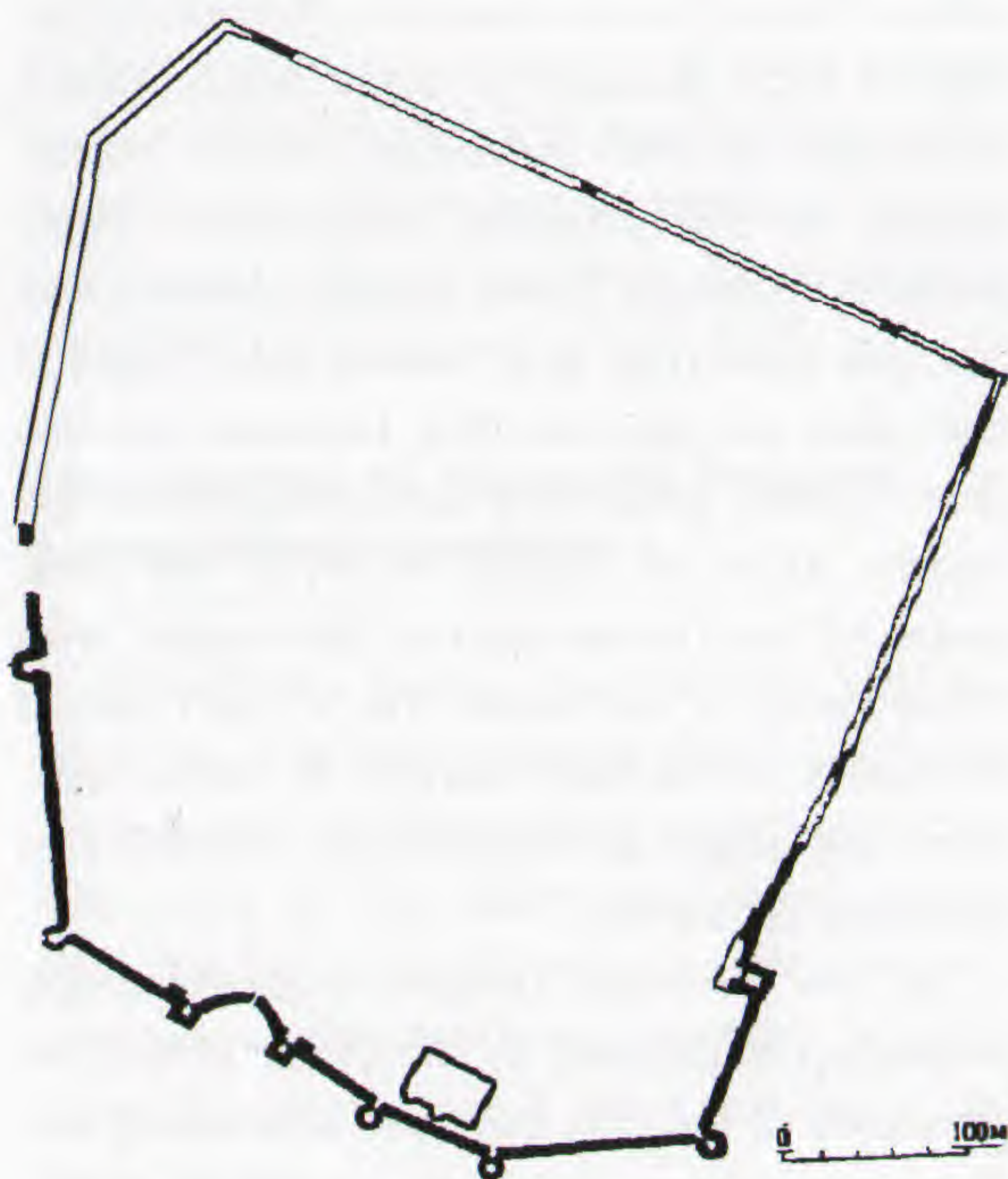


Fig. 1. Plan of Nicopolis ad Nestum (after Al. Milcheva)



*Fig. 2. Part of the layout of the southern wall (Photo G. von Bulov)*

second half of the 4th century AD. From the wholly investigated southern wall are visible protruding towers and the gate. Inside, sectors of a large house with a colonnaded courtyard are uncovered. Off the southern wall a bathing structure catered for the needs of part of the citizens. It was built in the first quarter of the 4th century, but in 376-378 the Goths set it on fire. Later it was reconstructed but in the late 6th century the Avars and Slavs destroyed it. The building was totally ruined a little later by an earthquake.

### **Everyday life**

Traces of a Thracian necropolis from the 1st millennium BC have been found in the vicinity. The name of the tribe is still unknown.

When Nicopolis was founded, the population was of local Thracian or Greek origin. This is indicated by the numerous votive monuments to the Thracian Horseman, Zeus, Artemis, Hermes, Pluto. Greatly revered was also the local river god Nestos, who irrigated the valley and gave fertility. Treasures of coins from Histria, Latae, and particularly from the nearby island of Thasos, found in the area, speak of the connections of this region with other parts of the world. For a short period Nicopolis ad Nestum minted its own coins, from the reign of Commodus (180-192) to Caracalla (211-217).

In the 3rd-4th century a stonecutting workshop functioned in Nicopolis. It met the demands of the city and the surrounding settlements. Bases, columns, partition slabs,



Fig. 3. Another fragment of the Nicopolis fortress wall (Photo G. von Bulov)

Dorian, Ionian and Roman-Corinthian capitals were produced. The local stonecutting school imitated the fashionable architectural details and types. Metallurgy and metal-working were also developed at a local level.

### **The citizens of Nicopolis enjoyed a precarious freedom**

During the Gothic wars of 376-378 and later, many of the besieged cities welcomed the invaders. In many cases, when the barbarians came in, the administrative-tax burden was alleviated and sometimes even their attitude was better than the governors'. In other cases it was not so, if great resistance had been put up.

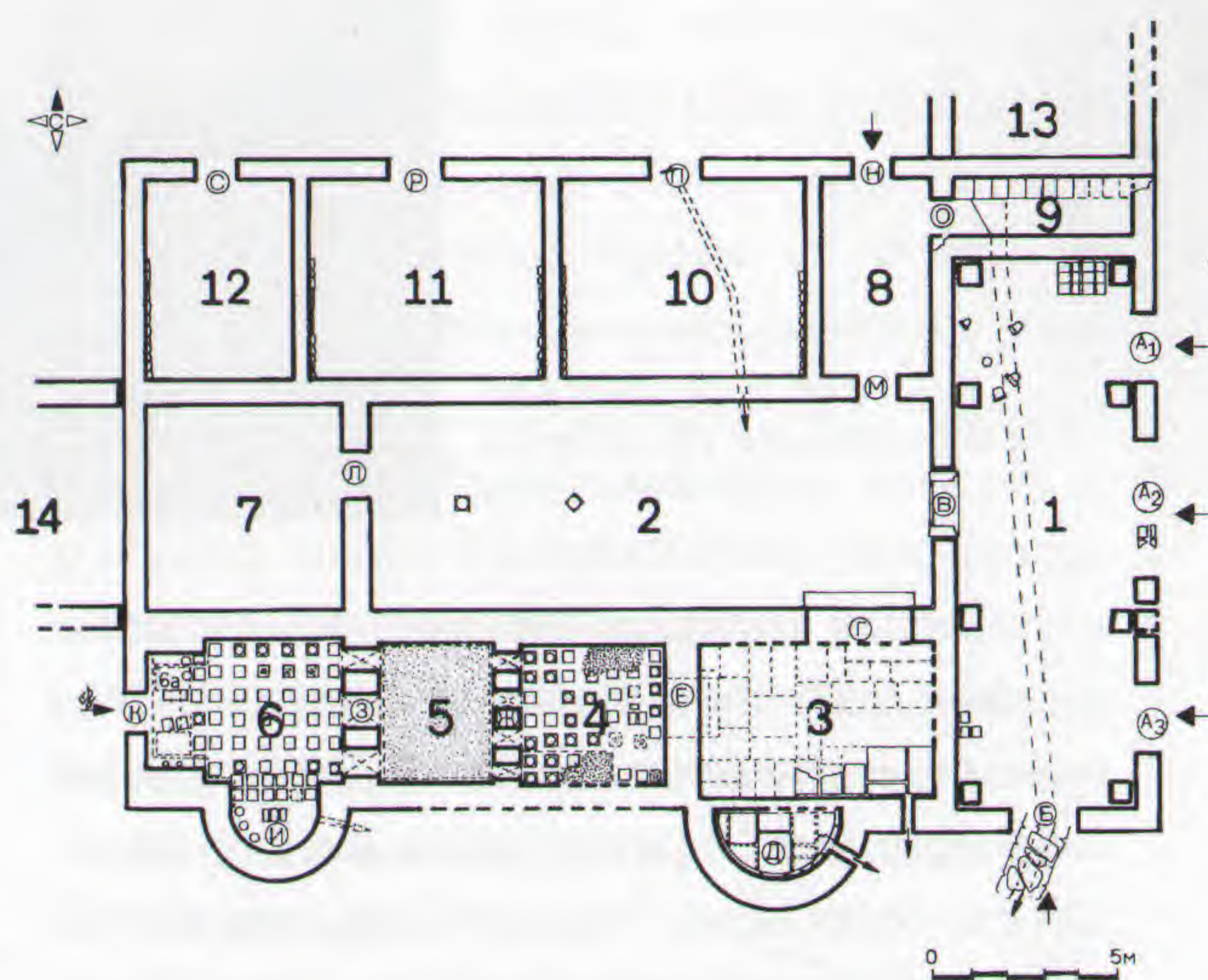


Fig. 4. Plan of the baths off the southern wall (after G. Kuzmanov)



*Fig. 5. The fallen ruins  
of the baths after the earthquake  
(Photo G. von Bulov)*

Historian Eunapius describes an instructive incident with the citizens of Nicopolis. They sneered at the other Thracians who expected help from the Emperor, which did not come. On the other hand, they cowardly awaited the enemy, uncertain about their fate. The citizens of Nicopolis however slighted those who were not able to defend themselves and precariously enjoyed their freedom.

The late antique author Socrates, who lived in the 5th century, mentions there was a bishop in the city. Several early Christian basilicas have been found in the environs.

After a long interruption, human life continued here with a small settlement in the Bulgarian Middle Ages, between 10th–14th centuries.

## Conclusion

The 14 Roman cities presented in this book sprang up near older Thracian settlements. The gifts of nature were used to the maximum – the cities were situated in plains, near a mountain, by pure drinking and mineral water springs, or on the bank of a large river (Marcianopolis, Serdica, Diocletianopolis, Pautalia, Philippopolis). The climate in the cities in Thrace was mild and agreeable, providing conditions for better living. In the Danube region the picture was a bit different. Here the winters were colder, with icy and searching winds, the springs and autumns were misty.

Ulpia Oescus, Novae and Durostorum were built on the right bank of the lower Danube. This was one of the most neuralgic zones at the Roman border (limes). Legions were stationed in all three of them. They had to repulse the barbarian attacks from the north. With the transfer of 5th Macedonian Legion, Oescus became a large city with the rank of a colony – the highest degree of provincial government. Later Novae and Durostorum became municipia. The administrative system was on the Italic model. The influence of Rome and the Italic cities, although on a smaller provincial scale, is also felt in the architecture. Thus, in Ulpia Oescus we have the typical elongated forum with temples, a basilica and a city hall (probably in the western part of the forum). The Latin language infiltrated much more easily than elsewhere. This was mainly due to the presence of the army, which required a common language for communication. In the civilian settlements lived Roman citizens who had acquired these privileges by birth as Italians

or by army service. They were the vehicles of the dominant language and culture in this province. The official Roman cults underlay the religious life in this area. In the 2nd century people from other parts of the Empire, primarily from the Hellenic East, came here, with the army or as civilians. Their presence however was not so conspicuous as in the cities in the interior.

Nicopolis ad Istrum and Marcianopolis, although to the north of the Haemus Mountain, initially belonged to the province of Thrace, and after 193 to Lower Moesia. Here the influence of the Greek language and culture was stronger. The government was on the model of the Greek poleis in the Eastern Mediterranean. The construction of the squares and their architectural decoration gives out the hand of the Eastern master. This influence is also evident in the cities south of the Balkan Range.

The urbanization in Thrace was at a higher level compared to Moesia. What is more, with the exception of the ancient Greek poleis on the western Black Sea coast, until the reign of Trajan there were no urban centers in Moesia. In Thrace, Philippopolis was undoubtedly the most magnificent, large and beautiful city. Although during the first three centuries it was not a provincial center, it remained the most famous in these lands. Later it was chosen to be capital of the province of Thrace with the homonymous diocese of Thrace. Serdica became the chief city of Mediterranean Dacia, and Marcianopolis – capital of Second Moesia.

In Thrace the Hellenic influence persisted. The Greek language was spoken and written mainly in the cities, while in the villages Thracian dialects were used. In the sphere of culture, art

and religion, the local tradition was intertwined with influences from the neighboring Greek lands. In many aspects of life is evident a mixture of these two cultures and beliefs, the so-called syncretism.

The population was ethnically variegated. Three main groups were predominant. The Greeks were dominant in the seaside settlements, but they gradually penetrated into the interior. With the urbanization of Thrace and Moesia, many immigrants came from the Hellenic poleis in the eastern Mediterranean world (Nicomedia, Ephes, Smirna, etc.). Quite a few Syrians, Egyptians and Judeans also settled here. In the two provinces many Roman citizens lived too. These were mostly veteran soldiers who received plots of land. They had adequate organizational and administrative experience, acquired during their long service. In the vil-

lages such men usually became mayors, and were often in the city government. The Thracian element, so strong in the rural areas, gradually penetrated in the cities. Wealthy local elite emerged, who occupied public and sacral posts. Men from different parts of the Empire served here (in the legions and their auxiliary units). In the 4th century, however, ethnic changes set in. Along the lower Danube and in the interior, federate tribes (allies) mostly of Gothic origin were settled. Gradually the so-called barbarian elements penetrated into Moesia and Thrace, in the military and civil life.

Even though not as imposing in appearance as the cities in Italy, North Africa and Asia Minor, the explored Roman period cities in Bulgaria exhibit a high urban development in comparison to other marginal or bordering provinces of the Empire.

Rumen Ivanov  
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## SEE BULGARIA



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